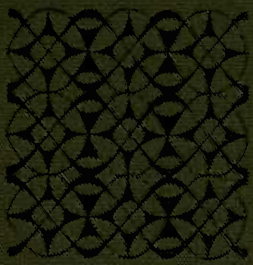
ONE THING IS CERTAIN

SOPHIE KERR



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ONE THING IS CERTAIN

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By Sophie Kerr

ONE THING IS CERTAIN
PAINTED MEADOWS
THE SEE-SAW
THE GOLDEN BLOCK
THE BLUE ENVELOPE
LOVE AT LARGE

ONE THING IS CERTAIN

A Novel

BY

SOPHIE KERR

"One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown forever dies."

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ONE THING IS CERTAIN. II.

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TO

A. C. K.

AND

J. W. K.

THIS STORY OF THEIR PEOPLE
AND THEIR TIMES IS DEDICATED

2130610

CHARACTERS IN PART ONE

Louellen West
Jane West, *her mother*
Amos West, *her father*
Annie West, *her sister*
Mart Bladen
John Henry Hyde
Miss Lena Hyde, *his aunt*
Doctor Tom Tithelow
Parson Truitt
Mrs. Truitt
Presiding Elder Todd
Miss Becca Simpson, *gossip and oracle*
Rena Massey, Esther Dawson } *Friends of the West girls*
Mr. Leonidas Ayres
Ches Layton, Della Layton } *Cousins of Mart*
Hance Wright, *Annie West's beau*
Ben Wright, *his cousin*
Dan Fisher, *Rena Massey's beau*
Sheriff Stevens
Matt Kemp, Joe Kemp, Jere Willis, Jim Thomas, Zeb Williams, Jay Dodson, Al Hignutt, Gid Cummins, Haney Griffith } *Young bloods of the neighborhood*
Rachel, *colored servant of Wests'*

(*Continued on next page.*)

CHARACTERS IN PART ONE (*Continued*)

EDWARD, *colored man, Rachel's brother*

EPHUM, SALLY } *colored servants of Mart Bladen*

A JEW TIN-PEDDLER

AMOS WEST'S KIN

- BEN WEST
- MARCIA, *Ben's wife*
- TRACY WEST
- SARAH, *his wife*
- GREAT-AUNT VIRGIE

JANE WEST'S KIN

- ELLA DEVENS, *her sister*
- CLARA DEVENS, *her niece*
- *Two other sisters*

VIRGIE *and* JOHN HENRY, *children born to* LOUELLEN, *and* JOHN HENRY HYDE.

ONE THING IS CERTAIN

PART ONE

NOTE: To disarm certain criticism, which will largely be local to the neighborhood described, let me here assure my readers that the story of Louellen West is entirely fictitious. I have used both family names and farm names common to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, but in no case, save in a very few minor characters of but slight importance to the story, do these names indicate the real families or farms that happen to bear them. So perhaps my friends will spare me the unflattering remarks of "Did you mean So-and-So?" or "I recognized Miss So-and-So perfectly," which followed my last book in this same locale, and take my word for it that my imagination, and not my memory, supplied me with the incident and the people of this novel.

SOPHIE KERR.

ONE THING IS CERTAIN

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

ANYONE who takes the river road and rides for two miles along its green shaded solitudes will find himself at the peak of that little triangular piece of Amos West's meadows, about which he went to law with Zebdial Fountain, and having proved his right to it, enclosed it with the highest, best-built snake-rail fence on the whole of the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It was not a valuable piece of land, but as Amos West said, "a boundary line's a boundary line," and carried his deeds into court to prove it. The contested bit of land was a queer jagged tooth, projecting from the otherwise even square of his prosperous acres, and had been cut into the adjoining tract by the man who once owned both farms under the tale-telling title of "Liden's Venture," because when poverty forced him to divide his possessions he was determined to retain for his own delight the great beech tree that marked the very tip of the tooth, the only tree of its kind anywhere in the neighborhood. For Liden, of "Liden's Venture" was a man who loved trees better than he loved people and was their tireless friend. The smooth silver trunk of the beech, and the gracious sweep of its branches were a delight to him that he wished to preserve.

Amos West cared not at all for the beech tree as beauty when at last it came into his possession, inherited from his father, who had reluctantly and after many delays fore-

closed his mortgage on the eastern side of the Liden lands, but since it was his, and its plot, he meant to make them secure. His father, gentle, pious and kindly, might have been willing to let Zebdial Fountain run a straight boundary line, just for the convenience of it, but Amos was not so easy to come over. Later he grew rather proud of the beech tree, not because it was splendid and unique, but because it was his own and he was a man who secretly considered anything he possessed to have special values.

But he would have cut down the tree, and chopped it into splinters and fired its stump, if he had known that his older daughter, Louellen, met Mart Bladen in the evening before lamp-lighting time under its concealing shade, and that they sat on his excellent high snake-rail fence and discussed whether or not she should run away and marry him.

Louellen, in her full lilac print crisply sprigged in purple, was firm and slim, her features cut with delicate precision, her eyebrows mere black pencil strokes, her short full upper lip curved like one of Romney's ladies. She challenged interest, as do all people of two natures. She had moods of being cool and definite and determined, sure of herself as only utter youth and inexperience warrant. At other times her gray eyes lit with sapphire lights, her mouth curled up irresistibly and any daring foolish impulse ruled her. Under stress she was confused, child-like. To-day she was eagerly in earnest.

"You've got to quit it, Mart. You've got to quit running with the Kemps and raising rookuses all over three counties, drinking, card-playing, breaking up meetings. I told you so after that big rampage down at Marshy-Hope revival. And you went right ahead and got into another mess at Wye camp. You're possessed."

Mart Bladen leaned on the fence and turned his head away, not through any shame, but for fear that she would see how much he wanted to laugh. "You make me think of one of these little scolding sparrows, Louellen, you do indeed. You know I don't mean any harm,—and nobody

gets hurt. It's only something to pass the time. You don't expect me to sit home and twiddle my thumbs, do you?"

"You might pass away the time by fixing up your place and working your crops. Last time I was by there everything looked so down at the heel and neglected."

This stung. "Well, it's not. I got as good crops as anybody. Just because the hedges aren't trimmed and everything's not whitewashed up to the nines you say it's shabby. I'd fix it up for you, honey. I'd trim up the bushes and make flowerbeds like the ones Mother used to have. I'd have the grass cut, and you could plant lilacs and honeysuckle and everything you want. Only you keep putting me off, so I've got no encouragement."

He was broad-shouldered, thin-flanked, tall, his head always high, his blue eyes never by any chance grave, not even now, when he was wheedling her. Every girl for forty miles was a little in love with him, but Louellen had his heart and she knew it. The knowledge made her cruel. She felt, as so many women feel toward their lovers, that she must make him over, change him from what he was into something different. She was too young to know how dangerous this is in the process, how unlikely in its success. Therefore she persisted with her ultimatum.

"If you won't do it now, if you won't stop running with the Kemps and Gid Cummins and Jere Willis and all the rest of 'em *now,* I know very well you'd never do it after I—after we—"

He gave a shout of delighted laughter. It was the first time he had ever got her so near to an admission. "After we're married. You try me, Louellen. You just try me. I dare you. I double dare you. Look, honey, why not today—right now? I'll put you up on Star behind me, and we'll ride down to Cambridge and be married before eight o'clock to-night. Oh, Louellen—please—honey dear—" He caught her hands, buried his face in them, pleading hard with touch and tone.

But she drew away. "No, I won't, Mart, and there's

no use you asking me. I won't run away and be married like it was disgraceful. I want my wedding party and my setting out, just like everybody else. And that's why I keep at you to steady down and stop carrying on so. If you did Pa'd come round. But after Marshy-Hope—why he said the constables pretty near got you. How'd I felt if you'd been put in jail! And how'd you felt! Oh, Mart, it's disgraceful! It's mean."

"Constables did pret' nigh get me, but 'twasn't my fault. It was Jere. He was on a skittish young horse, and he wasn't very steady and when things began to get too hot and we had to ride off he got thrown and he called, and none of 'em would go back for him but me. That's the whole truth. Don't you believe me, Louellen?"

"I don't see what difference it makes—Pa's just as down on you, and you were there and in all the devilment. Mart, won't you give it up,—the drinking, the sprees, the gambling? Won't you do it, Mart, for me?"

"So help me God, if you'll marry me I'll never drink another drop of hard cider or whisky or applejack or anything like 'em. I'll walk wide of the Kemps and only pass 'em a howd'ye-do on the road going by and not stopping. I'll quit cards, unless maybe you'd be willing to have a friendly euchre game or seven-up in the house sometimes, without any money passing. There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, if you'd marry me."

It was she who averted her head now, and her voice was low.

"What about Della Layton?" she asked.

"You don't believe there's anything in that? Why, Louellen, you can't. You know better."

"You go over there a lot. You take her round."

"She's my second-cousin, and she—a man can't hardly say it, but—I go once to a dozen times she asks me to come. You don't think I care anything about her? Why should I always be running after you if I want her? Louellen, be fair. What do you want to keep me hanging on tenter-

hooks for, for so long, and bringing up all these things that ain't worth thinking about? Marry me now, Louellen—I'll buy you all the setting-out you want and we'll give a big wedding supper ourselves if your Pa won't give you one. As for Della Layton!" He snapped his fingers. "And I'll go straight as a string—haven't I told you I would?"

She held to her purpose. "Then do it for me now. Go steady for three months and I'll believe you."

He sighed. "For a sweet little piece like you are, you sure do know how to blister a fellow. What's after you, anyway? Want me to be another praying machine, like John Henry Hyde? Want to see me walking straight and holy, passing the plate in church, leading in prayer, teaching in the Sunday School?"

This forced her to laugh with him—Mart Bladen, teaching in Sunday School, was comic. "All the same his place looks ever so much better kept than yours. I told you it wasn't so long since I was out that way."

His smile fled. "Were you at his place?" he demanded. "What were you there for? Did he take you? Who else went? You tell me, Louellen. I won't have you under John Henry Hyde's roof, not if I know it. Not now, or ever. He's too hard after you as it is, and your Pa favoring him, and all. What were you doing there? You tell me."

"Why—he entertained the whole Sunday School a couple of weeks ago. Didn't you hear of it? We all went, and had ice cream and cake out in his grove." She made round innocent eyes at him.

"He's a fine one to be entertaining the Sunday School! Why lookahere, Louellen, even if he didn't want to marry you, and even if your Pa wasn't so partial to him, I'd despise him. He's close as the bark on a tree. He whips his horses. And he never had a dog in his life. There ain't any right sort of man without a couple of dogs." He looked across the fence where Star, his mare, drooped a drowsy head, with Spot and Silly, his setters, waiting patiently beside her. He had made his protest with an almost agitated earnest-

ness. Dogs and horses were his daily companions. They were as close as humanity to him.

Louellen watched him, touched and interested. She wondered if she should tell him that it was John Henry Hyde's insistence and her father's powerful advocacy that had made her urge Mart to marriageable reform. No—better not. Mart was too headstrong, too rash. Yet she felt herself caught between two strong forces, and suddenly her sex became a strait-jacket.

"I wish," she said, "that there was something women could do besides get married. I wish they could do—something—for themselves—like the men do."

The words restored Mart's poise, gave him back his mirth. He did not probe through to their reason. They were to him irrelevant, a teasing feminine vagary. "There's nothing for women to do but get married unless they want to be old maids and sit in the chimney corner and knit," he declared. "And there's nothing for you to do, in particular, but marry me. Louellen,—you going to pass me your promise?"

All of his potent charm was in the words and they were compellingly eager, but very humble. She seized her moment. "I promise you this: if you'll go on good behavior—and you know what I mean, no breaking loose on anything—for as long as I say, then when the time's up—I'll—I'll—make you the promise you want, no matter what Pa says."

He did not try to take her in his arms or kiss her as she had expected. Instead he stood still, thoughtful, something speculative in his eyes. "It's going to be pretty hard, all of a sudden, you know, Louellen, breaking off everything, and without you there to help me."

She yearned to make it easy for him, but she would not. "Still, if you do it for me, then I'll know how much you care about me." She shied away from the bold word love, but it was in the air.

"Well, you mean, I mustn't break out into anything real wild and noisy," he cajoled.

"You know what I mean. You know just as well as I do. And, Mart, look here, this is the last time I can come down here for maybe two weeks. Harmony Camp opens Friday and we're going to tent. I've invited Rena Massey, and Annie's going to have Esther Dawson and that just fills the tent, with Pa and Ma."

"I might drop in to see you some Sunday—" he teased her—"for a little promenade."

"Don't come like you went to Wye, then," she flashed back. "Oh, Mart—it's not that I want you to be so good, but if you do this for me, I'll never have any more doubt of you—don't you see how 'tis?"

"Yes, I know. But, Louellen, I'm so plaguey uncertain. I don't mean to rip loose, but first thing I know I'm off. It's right dreary with nobody on the place but the niggers, and I get on Star here, and go careering off, or somebody comes by and gives me a hail, and then—one thing leads to another." His wistfulness continued, trying to make her comprehend the heat and urge of his young blood, his need of distraction.

She shook her head, determinedly. "I've said my last word, Mart. I told you before, but this is the last time. If you won't do this much for me, then it's all over. Oh, Mart—won't you? When I want you to, so much?"

"Honey—dear—yes, I will—I'll do every single thing you want. I'll take out my energy plowing and cultivating—though I do think there'd be time enough for that after we're married—and you won't hear anything about me except that I'm a changed character, steady as a clock, quiet as old Grandpa Martindale, and he never stirred out of the house for nineteen years, they say, and never spoke unless he had to. Now—you satisfied?"

"You got to keep it up three months," she exacted.

"Let's see—August—September—October—oh, now, Louellen, say two months. October's a grand month to get married in."

"Two months and a half, anyway." She swung herself

down from the fence. "I've got to go back. Pa'll be home before I get there if I don't look out. I told Rachel and Annie both if he asked for me to tell him I was off hunting guinea hens' nests. But I can't be too long, even so."

He stopped her, his hands on her shoulders, beseeching and longing: "Kiss me good-by, Louellen, this once. You're promised to me now. You're my girl. You've never let me kiss you. But now—please. I won't see you for so long." He stooped to her, drawing her close, but she pulled away.

"No—no! Not till I'm sure—not till you've kept your word about the—sprees—and the—the cards—and the night-riding. I'm not really promised to you till then. I won't let any man kiss me till I'm promised."

"It would help me a lot if you would. Just one." But he knew she would not. He had never had his way with Louellen as he had with a dozen other girls. It was one of the bonds that held him to her.

"No. But Mart—you've passed me your word—to keep steady—you've promised. And I mean it—if you break your promise I'll never have anything more to do with you. Never."

She picked up her white sunbonnet and made it a ruffled aureole about her brown hair, and took the hidden secret path through the crowding warm laurel and sassafras and young pine toward home. He watched her go. This, too, marked her difference from the other girls, for it was they who watched him mount his horse and ride away, lingering to catch the last glimpse of him. But it was always Mart who lingered to catch the last glimpse of Louellen. Only when the last faint sound and gleam of her were gone did he vault the fence, catch up Star's dropped rein and canter off down the river road, with Silly and Spot loping eagerly beside him. For once there was no laughter in his face. He had made a promise which he profoundly distrusted his ability to keep, for all its significance. It opened up an arid vista of work and no play, and this in mid-summer

when farm labor slackens, and the still nights are wonderful for riding; when he had arranged a main for his game cock Zulu King with Matt Kemp's Fancy; when all the cider presses were busy with the fragrant liquor he loved—when, in short, the tide of life flowed fullest and most free.

Then he brightened. It was only two months and a half—thirty—sixty—seventy-five days. "And she's worth it," he told Star, and shifted his knee to quicken her gait. "My girl! My Louellen!" He softened to dreams of her in the bare rooms where Ephum and Sally, his colored house-servants, now reigned supreme in slatternly comfort. He would fix it up for her, mow the grass-grown garden plot, plant the flowers she liked, nail up trellises, repair the falling arbor, paint and whitewash lavishly. It would all be fair and orderly again, as it had been in his mother's time. He was the youngest, left at home after his two sisters married, and he had never cared to change his scene.

Yet it was true, as he protested to Louellen, the dullness of his solitude had driven him to wild company, for he was a social soul, gregarious by instinct. All that life offered of sensation he hastened to take, and the very perfection and power of his body had retarded any overgrowth of conscience, for a man who can ride and drink all night and get up clear-headed and clear-eyed seldom develops the moral sense of the bilious.

Seven generations of Bladens had tilled the acres that were now his, and the first of them had landed at the time when Penn's intrigues and Coode's Associators were making the life of Charles, third Lord Baltimore, a daily uncertainty as to whether he was a "prince little less than a sovereign, or a mere absentee landlord." The first Bladen had come over as a servant, but presently had won his freedom, and taken up land, and as he was a diligent worker, and "merrie of heart" beside, according to the parish record of him, he had sound property and sound qualities to bequeath to his sons. All of the Bladens had been fair at a bargain,

honest, without taste for loose women, bitten by no spite or rancor, expert at farming and with cattle, and keen for mirth and good company, but very lax in church-going. It was so that Mart, the latest of the line, knew himself, and anything more was outside his sphere of what was right and reasonable. In his quick protest to Louellen against the cutting off of all his boisterous rough pleasures he betrayed his knowledge of himself.

Of course, when a man marries, he must expect to settle down—somewhat. It wasn't that he blamed her for exacting the promise, or that he meant knowingly to evade it, but—it was so devilish hard to say no when good fellowship called to his sporting spirit, and the quiet routine of the farm demanded to be spiced with adventure. He hoped fervently that he would be able to stick it out, and something in the back of his head reminded him that, if he shouldn't, maybe he'd be able to keep it quiet, or, quite possibly, Louellen wouldn't keep her word to let one more escapade divide them. No, she'd never do that—any more than he would do it with her, if it was the other way round. He laughed aloud at the thought of his Louellen rampaging, in need of his forgiveness.

"But she's got a streak of steel in her, out of old Amos sure. I wish she'd 've kissed me. . . ."

He did not imagine it, but on her way home, Louellen was echoing that wish. She had wanted that kiss, burnt for it. The very vehemence of her denial of it proved that to her, and she was ashamed. In her strict up-bringing to want to let a man kiss you was immodest, if not actually indecent. So she was ashamed. Besides she was afraid, afraid of the decision she had made. It wearied and alarmed her that she must decide. When she had cried out that she wished there was something women could do besides marry she was voicing that weariness and alarm. She was being urged so fast toward marriage, by Mart in secret, by John Henry Hyde openly, and with more urgency, because her father was his backer.

Her mother had remained oddly silent about John Henry's courting, and Louellen felt reservations in Jane West's silence when he was mentioned, scented criticism of him in the elder woman's calm scrutiny when he was present. She had said, "He's not got much mellerness about him," and Louellen had turned that phrase over in her thoughts very often, since.

Well, now she had made up her mind, once and for all. That is, if Mart . . .

But Mart would. He had promised. He had promised faithfully, even though with obvious misgivings. If he did not keep that promise—she shook her head. She could not face the answer to the question raised by that chill doubt. She put it away from her. He *must* keep it. Even so, even if he turned a model of propriety and industry it was not going to be easy to win her father over. Amos West was patriarchal in his ideas. Authority, he held, was vested in the male parent. It was almost impossible to fancy herself defying her father, and she knew well how he felt about Mart.

Amos West's dislike for Mart was long and deep-seated, based on a dark Puritanical hatred of all who love pleasure and cannot be barred from it, by law or public opinion. It irked Amos West that Mart should be able to stay away from church, and yet be as good a farmer as any of the godly. He could have seen a pestilence of drouth or insects descend on the Bladen acres with a pleasurable consciousness that God is not mocked, and no slightest twinge of pity for the misfortune of a fellow creature. It outraged him to see Mart cantering blithely away to godless diversions, when he himself was on his way to prayer meeting. As for the young man's pretensions to Louellen,—Amos West never even suspected the fervor and extent of them, but there was something about the way Mart looked and spoke to him, a light disregard of his disapproval, a sort of baffling twinkle of amusement at his frown, that woke in him a fanged anger. The souls of the two clashed involuntarily. There would

have to be a profound change in Mart before Amos West would so much as tolerate him. Yet Amos West was an honest man, a just man, and in most things, kind. His reprobation of the ungodly was sincere, but they did not move him to pity. Like Isaiah he spared not to lift up his voice to show them their transgressions. Like Malachi he felt it was right to tread down the wicked.

Louellen sighed. It seemed a tangled coil indeed, whichever way she approached it. The path from the beech tree had led her along a field of late corn, stiff rustling green. She threaded its maze quickly, came out near the stables, rounded the silver-gold bulk of the straw stacks, and on the lane to the house found Rachel picking into her apron the purple French plums from the tree by the beehives.

The negress turned at her step. "Oh, heah you is. Fine 'at guinea-keet's nes'?" she asked with a chuckle.

"Not a sign of it," said Louellen cheerfully.

"Well, you fine sompen else, I be boun'. Y'ain' come erlong so light-foot en wishful fer nothin'."

Louellen would have liked to tell her, but she was sure that Rachel knew anyway and telling would spoil their good understanding. She stopped and picked a handful of the bloomy perfumed fruit. Their color melted pleasantly with the purple of her dress, and she noted this absently, losing herself again at her cross-roads of purpose.

"Men are a nuisance, aren't they, Rachel! Always at you about something or other, always bothering, never satisfied to let you go your own way and take your own time, but hustling you into theirs."

"Listen to y', listen to y'! You ma'k me, chile, dishyer'd be a mighty po' worl', widout no tas'e to it at all, ef dey wasn' no men. Dey do mek trouble, but dey sure do keep things stirrin'."

"Well, that's true, anyway," said Louellen, with emphasis, and went on into the house.

CHAPTER TWO

RENA MASSEY had usurped the small mirror and stood before it trying to get a complete view of her white flowered polonaise, her tight black jersey and the narrow cherry-colored ribbon which she had tied about her full throat with drooping loops at the side. Annie West and Esther Dawson watched her with open admiration, Louellen a little more critically. Rena was the daughter of the man who kept the biggest dry-goods store in Manor, the county seat, and was therefore the only town mouse in the lot. As such her manner held a certain condescension. Not that she said anything—but she had a way of looking at their clothes and then at her own. And her chignon was quite twice the size of any of theirs. She had a round box of Pond-lily Face-powder which they envied heartily and as heartily agreed that it was a sinful vanity. She had a scent flagon, too, filled with clear pale green eau-de-cologne, which she dabbed on every fresh handkerchief.

They had come upstairs to dress for the evening service in the cramped upper story of the pine shack, which was, nevertheless, one of the best "tents" in the whole camp-ground, placed in the very center of the block facing the preacher's stand. They were all ready, except Rena, who was always last.

"I've got a little piece of blue velvet ribbon just that width I believe I could tie up like yours," said Louellen, watching the manipulation of the cherry bow.

"Well—you might try it," Rena assented airily. "But velvet's stiff. It ought to be moiré."

Louellen was not discouraged. For all Rena's style, her father was only a storekeeper running on borrowed money,—Amos West had said so, and he was not given to vain speech.

"I think velvet will look all right," she said, and got up off the bed where she had been perched with Annie and Esther, to rummage in her trunk. There was just room enough for her to get round the beds, bunks of rough lumber, but spread with spotless sheets and fine "Feather Star" and "Tree of Paradise" quilts. This "tent" was, like all the others, nothing but two rooms—one downstairs and one above—connected by a tiny rough stairway, built with a peaked gable, which fronted on the camp-ground, and gave it the look of a giant bird-box. It was unceiled, unplastered. In the upper room the windows were wide slits that extended all the way across the front and back, and could be closed in case of storms by hinged planks, now hooked up to let the air in, the opening covered with mosquito net. Two wide bunk beds, an old chest of drawers with the mirror atop it where Rena was prinking, a wash-stand with towels hanging on the bar, a kerosene hand lamp with red oil in its glass body,—these were all the furnishings. This room was given over, for the time of the camp-meeting, to the girls and their friends.

Downstairs was another bed, for Amos West and his wife, their bureau and wash-stand shunted behind a curtain which expressed the properties, and as many chairs as could be got into the remaining space. And the whole front, downstairs, was open to the camp-ground, closed at night by removable panels of planks, that fitted none too well. Louellen and Annie, wishful of elegance, had persuaded their mother this year to hang lace curtains at each side of the wide downstairs front, and tie them back with bows of pink ribbon. With a little variation in size and contents the West tent duplicated every other on the ground. For the ten days of these open-air services the faithful and their families lived a life that was half-gypsy, half-saint, and found the combination piquant and pleasing.

Louellen, with the ribbon in her hand, advanced boldly to the mirror. By sheer force of will she moved Rena away from it. Rena was fair-haired and pink-fleshed, blooming,—

in another five years she would be over-blown and her high color would be fixed in her round cheeks like the redness of a winter apple. Now she was luscious and she knew it. She watched Louellen with the ribbon complacently.

But Louellen's slender fingers, pointed, quick, were deft and sure, and when she had the bow tied to her liking she turned in triumph to her audience.

"There!" she cried. "What about that?"

"I think it's real stylish," ventured Esther Dawson, with a side glance at Rena.

Indeed, the clear blue brought out the blue lights in Louellen's eyes, contrasted charmingly with the shadowy écru of her India muslin. Rena, observing her, suddenly decided to be amiable. What was a blue ribbon, more or less. Louellen had too many beaux, desirable ones and energetic in their attentions, to be snubbed as a less attractive girl might be.

"It's sweet," said Rena. "It looks perfectly all right, even if it is velvet."

"Oh, I wish I had one," said Annie, looking from one to the other of the older girls. "Haven't you got another piece, sis?"

"You can take this one," said Louellen, with instant generosity. "I don't care. I just happened to think of it."

"That's just like you, Lou," commented Rena. "You'd give away your head if it wasn't tight to your shoulders."

"I won't take it," protested Annie. "I thought maybe there was another piece. I'm not such a pig as all that when you thought of it and it looks so nice on you."

"Yes, you take it. It'll look even nicer on you." Louellen was imperious, compelling. She was accustomed to rule Annie even in her generosities. She tied the blue ribbon about the younger girl's throat and pulled her up in front of the mirror. "It does look nice. You keep it, Annie,—I'll give it to you. Next time I go to town I'll get me another."

"I hate to—" but she turned this way and that, fas-

cinated by following the mode of so fashionable a person as Rena. "You sure you don't care?"

"Not a bit." Louellen glanced about. "We're all ready, aren't we? Don't let's go down right away. There'll just be a parcel of old folks down there, Miss Becca Simpson in her changeable silk and her false front, and old Mrs. Esma Lowe, and all talking about nothing but how beautiful Parson Truitt's prayers are and who's going to exhort to-night, and who's been to the mourner's bench, and who hasn't. There won't even be anybody promenading, yet."

The four girls acquiescently settled themselves in a row where they could look out of the wide front aperture, sitting on the side of the bed nearest to it. First Annie, slight, fair-haired and wide-eyed, prim in white piqué, fingering the new blue bow with little pleased movements; then Esther Dawson, small and dark and sharp, yet unconquerably shy, in a bright pink muslin that did not become her, a string of gold beads close about her neck, a gold fringed bracelet with a black enameled buckle fastened round her thin wrist; then Rena, opulent, stylish, perfumed, her heavy shining hair looped intricately, her little pink tongue constantly moistening her full impatient lips; and at the foot of the bed Louellen, definite, cool and quick, no more eclipsed by the larger, more vivid Rena than a tea rose is eclipsed by a peony.

Before and beneath them in the August twilight was the open square, and at the very center the preacher's stand, a high platform with a canopy roof supported by four corner posts. A big tin kerosene lamp hung there, as yet unlighted, and there was a wooden pulpit with Bibles and hymn books on it, and at one side a small organ and some chairs for the choir. There were other chairs and a bench where assisting ministers might sit until their turn came to exhort or offer prayer.

All around the preacher's stand clustered the trees of the grove, oak, pine, and sweet-gum, moving their branches a little in the evening breeze as if to exchange sedate com-

ment on the unusual scene below them. In among the trees were the benches for the congregation, nothing more than boards nailed on low supports, splintery and uneven, backless, surely a test of piety's endurance. And at the edge of these benches, separating them from the surrounding square of tents and binding them into coherent shape, was a wide walk, sprinkled with sawdust, known as the promenade. Here the young folks strolled before and after service, round and round endlessly, pausing now and then to visit friends in the tents and to observe the other promenaders. Older folk did not often promenade, though they found it a diversion to watch. It was a wonderful place to display a new frock or a new beau, to find out what was going on all round the camp-ground—and it was the sole concession to social vanity and worldliness that the campers made.

At the four corners of the square of benches there were wooden trays filled with sand, mounted on posts that stood high above the heads of the crowd. On the sand was piled light-wood which would presently be fired to shed a murky smoky light over the scene of worship. A negro man, standing on a high box, was piling fuel on the nearest of these trays and the girls watched him.

"That's old Unc' Jeems King that waits over at the boarding tent," said Esther Dawson, recognizing him. "He's the best old nigger. Yesterday, when I lost my handkerchief he came all the way round the square trying to find out whose it was."

"The boarding tent's been elegant this year," commented Rena, who liked food. "With all that crowd for dinner to-day there was enough and to spare. But I was glad we went over early—quite a sight those four sucking pigs roasted so beautifully and sitting in a row down the table! I'm glad I saw 'em before the carving began. And that chicken pie—grand!"

"It's been a real nice camp," added Esther. "I'm sorry it breaks up to-morrow."

"So'm I," said Annie. "It's been fun."

"Better not let Brother John Henry Hyde hear you calling it fun," mocked Rena with a side-glance at Louellen. "He'd take a fit."

"Oh, he won't care what I say," giggled Annie. "But if Louellen said it, it would *pain* and *distress* him. Such levity!"

Louellen tossed her head. "It's nothing to me what pains and distresses John Henry. He always acts like he'd swallowed a poker."

Rena looked at her curiously. John Henry Hyde's property made him what she thought of as "a catch." Every one knew how hotly he was courting Louellen, and that her father favored him. His persistence had driven off most of the other young men who had been hanging stickily round the Wests' front parlor ever since Louellen was seventeen. Coolly to run down so eligible a match argued a disinterestedness of which Rena was incapable and the validity of which she questioned in another. Hadn't she seen John Henry on hand every day at the camp, and Louellen with him? Usually such appearances meant only one thing, an engagement. But Louellen was so offhand about him . . . and besides there were rumors. . . .

And now Esther voiced these rumors teasingly: "I reckon Mart Bladen wouldn't object to a little levity—"

"Sh-h," said Louellen, with an involuntary gesture, indicating the room below.

"Pa's so *down* on him," whispered Annie, completing the warning. "Won't even hear his name!"

Rena's eyes flashed with real envy. To have Mart Bladen paying you such attention as to win your parents' disapproval! How did Louellen do it! Certainly not by her looks. It was all a mystery to Rena. She spoke with hopeless enthusiasm: "Oh, isn't he the most fascinating *thing!* But so wild. I heard that the constables almost got him down at Marshy-Hope chapel. He's a case, if there ever was one."

Louellen could not keep from explaining why he had been so nearly captured. "He went back after Jere Willis," she whispered. "Took him up on his horse and got away with him. The others all rode off, the Kemp boys, and Gid Cummins, and Jim Thomas and Zeb Williams—the whole lot of 'em. Jere was riding a young horse and it threw him, and he called out and Mart went back."

"You're very well informed," tittered Rena.

Louellen flushed. She had not seen nor heard from Mart since the day under the beech tree, nearly two weeks ago, and he had been so anxiously and constantly in her thoughts that to speak of him, even blindly, was a relief. "I think we might's well go down. It's pretty near time for evening service," she said.

She led the way and the others followed and maneuvered themselves down the narrow twisted stairway, holding their long skirts from unplaned edges and projecting nail heads. As they went Esther nudged Annie and nodded toward Louellen, and Annie made knowing eyes. They hunched their shoulders and giggled silently.

CHAPTER THREE

THEY came down to a scene that rippled and waved with excitement. Lamps had been lit, people had come in, the bare little room was crowded. In the midst of it stood Amos West, tall, austere, his long beard and shaven upper lip, his high narrow forehead and fierce brows giving him the aspect of a minor prophet of the more denunciatory sort. Two other men were there, one rotund, red, truculent, the other unmistakably a cleric, bland by custom but now ruffled and apprehensive. His voice, even in conversation, had the resonant twang and the conventional downward swoop at the end of a phrase that mark the old-style Methodist.

About the men clustered their women-folk,—Mrs. West, her gold watch chain breaking the plainness of her tight buttoned black alpaca basque, her lips pursed, but a vagrom gleam of humor in her eyes, was at her husband's elbow. She was sometimes suspected of sympathy for the unregenerate, though her actions never justified this suspicion. The others were negligible, but for one, Miss Becca Simpson, short, immensely fat, dressed, even as Louellen had said, in a red and green changeable silk, extinguished in ruches, her false front a mass of curly black ringlets; her eccentricities were accepted as harmless, and her exaggerations gave a peppery tang to local gossip.

The three men were talking at once, but through and over their voices the preacher's penetrating accents prevailed.

" . . . and at the first intimation I came at once to Bro' Ayres and told him that as overseer of the camp-ground he was responsible for law and order, and that if these rowdies really planned to create any disturbance he should provide extra constables or notify the sheriff—"

"They cut the harness off half the horses down at Ma'shy-Hope revival," flung in Miss Becca, with relish.

" . . . but he has done nothing whatever about it and with the Presiding Elder to preach to-night, and ministers from some of the best charges on the Shore on the preachers' stand—and the last night of camp—it's nothing short of disgraceful."

Brother Ayres defended himself, his red face getting redder, his little eyes snapping: "Now don't you get so excited, Bro' Truitt. Ches Layton rode in not half an hour ago with his sister, and he said there wasn't the slightest danger of that gang coming round here, and he cert'ney ought to know what's going on, seeing's he's kin to Mart Bladen and hand in glove with 'em all, good bit of the time. By jolly, they better lay pretty low after that Wye trouble."

"Who brought the rumor in the first place?" asked Amos West.

The girls had clustered at the back, silent, all ears, but at the mention of Mart Bladen Annie pinched Louellen's arm. Louellen did not quiver. She was turned to stone, waiting, listening.

"John Henry Hyde. Said somebody from over at the Corner told him. Said the whole lot of 'em had been at Joe Kemp's place all day, drinking hard cider, and whooping like a band of Indians. Tillie Kemp got scared and took the children and run over to a neighbor's, but Joe come after her and made her go back and get dinner for 'em. Oh, they're ripe for any devilment, but, by jolly, they won't start none here. They know I'd land every man jack of 'em in jail, soon's wink."

Louellen curled her lips in faint derision. As if anybody was afraid of Mr. Leonidas Ayres, least of all the band of men he was talking about! He'd never put any one in jail—he was going to run for sheriff in the fall and he wanted the Kemp influence. She relaxed a little. None of this implicated Mart, and that was the only thing she cared

about. It hadn't even been said that he was with them. Of course, he wasn't. She told herself this fiercely.

"Well, I think some action should be taken," persisted the preacher, looking hostilely at Bro' Ayres.

Amos West's voice, calm, decisive, settled the agitation. "It's about time for evening service. People are beginning to gather. You go along up to the preacher's stand, Bro' Truitt, and Bro' Ayres and I will circulate round and get some of the men together, and decide what to do in case there should be trouble. Don't you be anxious. We'll organize so's to keep everything under strict surveillance, from the road outside to the furthermost back tent. At the first hint of any disturbance we'll be ready to deal with it."

It is never easy to gainsay assurance and commonsense. The Reverend Truitt was in the minority.

"Yes, of course we will—I said I would in the first place," said Leonidas Ayres, puffing with importance. And the preacher, over-ruled, left the tent, followed by the two others.

Having kept silence under male domination, now that it was removed the women promptly crisped and fluttered and exclaimed. In the background the girls caught hands and thrilled. They also darted watchful eyes past their elders out toward the preaching square. It was time for the young men to appear, their escorts for evening service. Each one of them had an engagement and expected a suitor, even plain little Esther Dawson, for Hance Wright, who would presently come for Annie, had said that he would bring his cousin Ben from Snow Hill with him, and that Ben hadn't got a girl. It was tacitly understood, therefore, that he would accompany Esther, while Hance paired off with Annie. Dan Fisher was to come for Rena, and John Henry Hyde would as usual be waiting on Louellen.

Even while they watched for them, these more regular and godly youths were almost forgotten in the prospect of the presence of the county's band of hard-drinking, hard-riding, card-playing, fox-hunting, blasphemous, irreligious

rips, young bloods whose chief distinction was hilarious deviltry.

"My goodness gracious," shrilled Miss Becca, her black eyes a-glitter, her false front rakishly askew, "I don't know where I'm going to sit to-night. They'll maybe ride their horses right up to the preacher's stand. That's what they did down at Wye. It'll give me a heart spell—" but she was not displeased at the prospect.

"You come with me, Miss Becca," said Mrs. West. "We'll sit close to one of the trees, and if anything goes on you can get round behind it. I never yet saw a horse that could ride over a tree." She smiled as she said it. She, too, despite her staid voice and plain dress and her position as wife to Amos West, that good man and deacon of the church, was still enough of Eve's daughter to welcome the serpent.

"D'you reckon they'll bring their pistols, Mis' West?" asked Rena, pressing forward. Miss Becca gave a faint scream at the bare idea.

"Law no, Rena," said Mrs. West, "and if they do they'll only pop 'em off in the air. They don't aim to hurt a soul. It's just wildness."

A hard-faced little woman in severe black mitts, who had kept silence so far, took up this word. "I never expected to hear you excuse and condone such sinfulness, Sister West," she pounced. "Those rascals ought to be jailed every one, I say. And they're all headed straight for perdition."

Mrs. West stooped and pulled her bonnet box from under the bed, took therefrom a plain bonnet trimmed with a bunch of quivering bugles, unrolled and tied the strings tight under her chin before she answered. "There's a wide difference between wildness and wickedness, Sister Truitt," she said at last, "and I've lived to see many a sporting young fellow settle down and be as good and as lib'ral a church member as any. We got no call to condemn too free. Sometimes it comes too close home for comfort." This was a sure shot, for Sister Truitt's only brother was known to have been a reveller in his youth.

There was silence after this retort, but Miss Becca's triple chins quivered with suppressed glee. "Now," said Mrs. West, "I guess we're ready. When you girls leave, I want you, Louellen, to put out the big lamp and turn down the little one and set it on the stand there. Don't be late and don't set too far back. You know your Pa don't like it."

They watched the elders depart, Miss Becca rolling along like a gay balloon between two dark supports. "Mis' Truitt'll think twice before she snaps up your mother soon again," giggled Rena. "I was so tickled I almost laughed right out. She looked like she'd tasted the vinegar jug."

"So'd I," chimed in Annie. "Serves her right. I saw her cutting her eye at your cherry ribbon, Rena, and I'll bet she was just dying to say something about worldly gewgaws and vanity. I kept my hand up over mine. Oh—here come Hance and his cousin."

Two youths approached, awkwardly, but with determination. They verged on the dandy with their tight pantaloons, their fancy cashmere vests, their flat scarves of shot silk, their straw sailors with striped ribbon bands. Hance was clean shaven, but the other had incipient whiskers, a manly red fuzz that fringed a face so young as to be almost cherubic.

They stopped before the West tent. Introductions were got through, and then there was an uncertain pause. Louellen, feeling their bashfulness, took them in hand. "You go on, you four," she said. "There's such a crowd you'll not get good seats if you don't. Sit over at the other side and try to hold places for us, won't you?"

This easy arrangement sent them off at once, Annie with her fingertips on Hance's stiffly crooked arm, Esther snuggling up determinedly to Ben. Esther did not often have a beau, and her shyness could not prevent her from making the most of such a chance.

"Esther certainly is man-crazy," pronounced Rena. "Look at her. Oh my, there goes the second bell. What ever has

become of Dan! I don't want to be scrooged up next to some fat woman with a slobbering baby. My, what a crowd! They say the Presiding Elder's going to preach his hell-fire sermon to-night, and that always draws people. Oh, Lou—*do* you believe they're coming? The Kemp crowd, I mean."

"I don't suppose so. I think it's just talk," said Louellen, and turned away her face. "Here's Dan."

Rena was instantly coquettish, bridling, smiling, pouting. "My goodness, but you do keep a person waiting! I had a good mind to go on without you."

"I was out posting men round the grounds," said Dan importantly. "Mr. Ayres asked me to help him out a little. Louellen, you going with us?"

"No, thank you. John Henry's coming for me."

"He'll be long pretty soon—he's out with Mr. Ayres, too. We got watchers way down the road."

"D'you really believe they're coming?" inquired Rena, stepping off the tent floor beside Dan. Louellen leaned to hear his answer as the two edged their way into the now crowded promenade.

"I shouldn't be surprised. They been drinking and hollering all day. People that come past Kemps' say they could hear them out to the road, and you know when they once get started they don't stop. Gid—and Joe—and Mart—and Zeb Williams—" They passed out of earshot.

Louellen drew back and with the movement retired into the fastnesses of her own troubled thoughts. Mechanically she put out the big lamp, turned down the little one and set it on the stand. Then she sat down again, her eyes fixed absently on the scene before her. The summer night had closed over the camp-ground, deep blue, mysterious, impenetrable, warm with desire, dark with a pagan beauty that pressed down the flare of the pineknots, muffled and veiled the mounting voices as they essayed the hymn, frustrated in the hearts of the crowd the desire to center themselves luxuriously on sin and repentance, troubled them

with vague unsettling nerves, oppressed them with their powerlessness. Even in the thickest of the crowd there was no peace, no serene devout attention. People kept glancing over their shoulders, shifting, restless. They thought it was the impending raid, but it was not. It was Nature, taking toll of their emotions, without haste, without shame, laughing at them, mocking them, not unkindly, but as if they were small foolish children to be played with and disregarded. The eddying smoke of the light-wood might have been fumes from little secret altars dedicated to Pan, so fragrantly, so troublingly, it wreathed amongst them. The yearning slow harmonies of the sacred song might have been a chant raised to propitiate and supplicate Demeter or Diana.

To Louellen, listening, seeing, feeling, with senses made keen by the past two weeks of waiting, the night's withheld, yet promised mysteries, were weight to the heart. Dan Fisher had said Mart's name as one of those who had been rioting at the Kemps'. But she would not believe it. It was impossible. Still, the careless surety with which that name had been spoken opened a rift of doubt.

Hardily, she forced herself to stare into this rift, to compass all its depth. If Mart had done this thing, if he was really loosed again in another of his meaningless wanton follies, she was through. She had said it, and she would keep her word, no matter what it cost her. And that meant that she must marry John Henry Hyde. It would not be possible to deny him any longer. For she knew that only by her marriage to another could she finally close the door to Mart.

And now she thought of John Henry. How little she knew him, how different he was from all the people of her ken! Six years ago he had appeared in the neighborhood, a close-mouthed, dark youth, well supplied with money just inherited, and after a prolonged investigation he had driven a hard bargain for the old Temple farm next to the Bladen place. He had imported an angular, restlessly energetic

Aunt Lena from amongst his kin back in York State, as they called it, as housekeeper for him, and had at once taken his place amongst the Methodist congregation with a seriousness and a narrow-minded fervor of piety that delighted many of the elders, and Amos West in particular. There was a curious affinity between the two men, and Amos West lost no time in bringing him into his home as a guest for dinner. There he had seen Louellen, still with short skirts and long braids, and he had made up his mind to marry her.

He followed a narrow path, John Henry, with his farm which he tilled amazingly well, his church which he served with a bigoted devotion, and his intent craving for this one woman, biding his time restlessly until she would be old enough to be won.

It had been flattering to Louellen, at first, but as she matured, she had not liked him so well. He was too assured, too much the owner. And there was something else. Of late, as she had turned toward Mart, and John Henry had insensibly felt her recede from him, he had grown more importunate. His hard eagerness, the avid clutch of his hands toward her repelled her as something physically not to be borne. She hated to have him breathe hard and break into feverish sweat at her nearness. Something essentially virginal in her shrank from his controlled yet obvious passion. And he never joked and he never laughed. While Mart . . .

Always she came back to Mart. How different, how gay, how utterly irresponsible and persuasive he was! Her drooping mouth lifted just to think of him. How easily, how carelessly, how wheedlingly he had tempted her to go against her father's will! Remembered scraps of talk came back to her. "Of course you'll come down to the beech and meet me—you wouldn't let me linger alone down there and die of a broken heart—and maybe catch cold, too." . . . "Let's have our fun first and work afterward, if there's any time left" . . . Mart, to whom no man was bad unless

he abused his horses or his dogs. Mart, who thought that to sit in church was a pitiful waste of a sunshiny day or a silver moonlit night. Mart, as he had looked at her at their last meeting, more serious than she had ever seen him, oddly uncertain, appealing.

Why, why, she wondered with sudden vehemence, had she been fool enough to make him promise! Why hadn't she trusted him, gone with him, and tasted adventure fearlessly! And yet—there was the memory of poor draggled Tillie Kemp, sallow and scared and afraid to call her soul her own. Five years ago she had run away with Joe Kemp, then a dashing blade, now a settled worthless rowdy. Her subsequent misery was accepted by herself and the community as final, and as just. Even Jane West had said: "She's made her bed and now she must lie in it."

So her warm impulse toward Mart ebbed away. But she could not believe that he had gone against his promise to her. Even if the Kemp boys and their gang had been drinking all day and were working up to one of their wanton raids on the camp-meeting, it didn't necessarily follow that Mart was with them. She painstakingly went back over the evidence. Mart had been mentioned only twice, once by Bro' Ayres, and then only as Ches Layton's cousin, and Ches had scouted the idea of any raid. But Dan Fisher had said, clearly, that he was at the Kemps', and drinking, and Dan had no malice against Mart, was, in fact, his friend, would not lie about him. Even in Bro' Ayres' statement that it was John Henry who had got the news that the raid was on from some one who had driven in from the Cross Roads, there was no particular mention of Mart, and if any one would try to bring Mart's name into it, fairly or unfairly, it would be John Henry.

So all the connections were vague, tenuous. And yet—and yet a cold premonition lay on her spirit. If Mart should do this thing it could only mean that he did not love her, did not want her as much as he wanted drink and deviltry. She gripped her hands together, bereft, forlorn, and prayed

that it might not be true, prayed to keep her faith in her lover, to keep his love for her. She could not bear it if he did not love her, and did not keep his word. The thought of his bright beauty, his laughter, his eyes that drew and held her,—she prayed that they might be hers, incoherently, achingly, shamelessly, casting away all shame. She tried to put her will that Mart should not leave her and break her heart between him and his riotous desires. She sent her will out into the darkness and tried to reach him, to interpose, that she might not suffer this irreparable loss. And all the time she knew that she was impotent, powerless, that she could not touch him.

CHAPTER FOUR

OUTSIDE, the congregation, compact, crowded, had listened, still with a certain unwonted restlessness, to a long prayer that recounted the glories and pleasures of the Lord's service, especially as dispensed at this camp-meeting of the faithful, and besought a continuation of these mercies to those who deserved them. The devout had punctuated and annotated this petition with unctuous "A-a-men" and "Glory" and one old brother had offered an enthusiastic "Praise the Lord" or two as confirmation of its truth. Another hymn was now given out and the choir on the platform raised it, a shrilling emotional soprano in the lead.

"Jesus, thou all-redeeming Lord,
Thy blessing we implore;
Open the door to preach Thy word,
The great effectual door."

And John Henry Hyde, tall, dark, hurried from his usual calm, stepped up into the tent. It startled her, he came so suddenly into the subdued light, he seemed so tall, so assured.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Louellen," he began. "You ready? All the others gone?" Her mood took a quick turn, lighter, more commonplace. This tone of John Henry's—why, it was that of a husband of years' standing. She resented it. His assumptions were always sparks to the resin of her quick temper. To-night they were a positive offense.

"You needn't have come at all. I could sit here and hear every word, distinctly. I'd just as soon not go out into the crush."

It threw him into instant confusion, her attack. "But you said you'd go with me," he cried, his assurance gone.

"And I waited for you, didn't I? We'll have an awful time getting good seats now. I asked Annie and Esther to try to hold places for us, but I know they couldn't all this time."

She shrugged her shoulders in vexation that somehow explained her to herself. "We sound for all the world like Pa and Ma having an argument," she thought. To end it, she took his arm and they started out into the crowd. She glanced up at him and saw his face clouded with disappointment, harsh, sullen. "I'm not going to coax him round," she told herself determinedly. "He can sulk it out."

But presently she repented. "For goodness' sake, John Henry, don't look so black. Everybody's noticing you."

"I don't know why you want to torment me," he answered, low and fiercely.

Of all the unreasonableness! Was she to blame for him being late, she who had waited for him when she might have gone with the others? Torment him—when it was he who had tormented her and had for a long time, always pestering and plaguing her to marry him!

He went on: "I wouldn't have been late but there's a rumor out that the Kemp boys and their lot are going to ride in and break up the preaching and Bro' Ayres got some of the men together and organized 'em. We're not going to have any rookus here like down at Wye. They wa'n't ready for 'em there. But we are. If they come they'll run right into a trap. We'll land the whole lot in jail—that'll cool 'em down. Time this country was cleared of that bunch of rips and rascals." He was fervently vindictive, a righteous castigator. He looked like a hawk just before it strikes.

There was no time to say anything more. They had found a vacant space on a side bench and inched into it. The hymn was over. The Presiding Elder, a shrewd, grim apostle, with long-stretched neck, and a wide thin flexible mouth, had risen beside the pulpit and was giving out the text of the sermon on which his fame as soul-winner rested.

"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God."

He rolled out the words slowly, tremendously, and his voice searched the camp-ground. No gentle shepherd he, but a rod of chastisement to the sinner, an angry, pitiless prophet. The congregation became still before him, their restlessness awed into abeyance. The pagan spirit of the night retreated before this man's magnetic will, his oppressive purpose.

"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God."

He repeated the text three times, each time more penetratingly, more harshly. He beat down inattention, indifference. Even naughty little boys, wriggling with all the irrepressible muscles of immature growth, sat motionless and fixed round awed eyes on him, believing he was aware of each one of them.

But Louellen West did not hear him, did not heed, though she too sat motionless. She turned so that her arm would not touch John Henry for she could not bear his nearness. He and his kind to set a trap for Mart Bladen, to disgrace and break him! And then her heart burned against Mart, wanton, shameless, laughing Mart. Mart, who had, she felt with growing certainty, broken his word and proved that he held her dearest wish but lightly, that the barrier of her love was too slight to keep him from his chosen pleasures. If she could only believe that it was not so, that he was not drinking and carousing with the Kemps! And again she had the strange wish that she had not asked him to make the promise. If she had not, she need not suffer so.

A sudden weariness seized her. Why should she be fast in this ferment of men and their desires, their yieldings and their obstinacies, the imposition of their wicked selfishness—for that was all it was. Mart Bladen's selfishness in riding with the Kemp gang—John Henry's selfishness that he was intent to shame and hurt Mart, because he suspected

her tenderness for him. Whilst between them she bore the buffet of their wills, the scourge of their cravings.

" . . . lakes of fire, boundless, shoreless, bottomless, . . . river of fires, . . . molten, . . . flowing forever in endless scorching tides of flame . . . engulfing sinners . . ."

The Presiding Elder's cruel glorying certainty cast tremors of fear over his hearers, they shuddered in the warm night.

" . . . repent . . . repent . . . the fiery vengeance of the Lord is waiting . . . flaming . . . burning pits of red-hot coals . . . burning forever . . . the hot blue scorch of the ravenous tongues of flame flaring up . . . the reek of brimstone . . . scarifying, searing, shriveling . . . and through it all the echoing groans and screams of sinners' lost souls in the eternal, untellable agony of punishment . . . burning forever . . . burning forever . . . yet always unconsumed, because their torture is eternal, so ordained by the offended might and majesty of the Omnipotent Jehovah . . . forever damned because they knew not God. . . ."

He exulted in the promise, dwelt upon its horrors with gloating surety. The words hung in the palpitating air and mingled with the smoke from the lightwood until it seemed a faint reek from the hell he pictured.

Here and there a man hid his face in his hands, girls averted their eyes, and leaned close to their lovers. The exhorters behind the preacher looked round in expectation of a rich harvest. When the sermon was over and the invitation to the mourner's bench had been given, these exhorters would go amongst the congregation, inviting, encouraging the timid sinner, and inquiring piercingly, "Are you saved, sister?" "Are you saved, brother?" "Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"

Parson Truitt and some of the older ministers listened more critically. They had heard this sermon before, and though they knew its merits, they were not tremendously moved thereby. One or two of them knew it almost by heart. Bits of it they had appropriated for use from time

to time in their own tamer discourses. Withal they kept the look of deep and awed attention, the mien due to a preacher of the Presiding Elder's eminence.

Suddenly, in the rich attentive silence, attuned to the ringing discourse now approaching its climax, far away there rose a faint hullabaloo, a tramping of horses' feet, shouts, galloping, ribald mirth,—strange obligato for this overwhelming solo of denunciation. Nearer, nearer it came, the edge of the congregation began to stir, to ruffle, to murmur. Waves of exclamation, of alarm eddied in through the body of worshipers, and the tumult came nearer, nearer, unchecked, unstayed. Whoopings, strange, uncouth, drunken cries, rallying, dying, rising again, drummed through with driven, pounding hooves. Whips sang in the air . . . "Right through to the preachers, God damn 'em! Go it, boys!"

The congregation was on its feet, turning with chaotic mass motions, a milling helpless herd. Mothers caught their babies to them, tried to get out to safety, their men fending for them. The exhorters and the ministers stood helpless, twittering with fear and futile indignation, adrift as to necessary action, but the Presiding Elder was of better mettle.

"Quiet," he called, his voice a clarion. "Quiet . . . Go slow! Women into the tents or up on the benches, and stand still. Men form together and meet these sons of Belial. . . . "

At the first intimation of the coming of the rowdies, John Henry Hyde had attempted to rally his cohorts, but in the wild shifting buffeting rush it was impossible. Louellen, who had leaped on the bench, saw him caught in a swirl of fighting panic-stricken women, sweating and screaming. He waved his arms and pushed and thrust about, but he could not get out. . . . The staccato of revolver shots was added to the mêlée, and through the main avenue of the camp the invaders galloped in pell-mell, people falling, crawling, hurtling out of their path as a miracle. Louellen leaned and looked, forgetting to be afraid. She must know if Mart was there. Every other feeling was swallowed in

the intensity of her seeking. If he was there . . . but he could not . . . he could not . . . it would be too cruel. . . .

"Where's the hell-fire parson?" shouted one raucous hilarious voice. "We'll give him a taste of hell-fire. . . ." They charged through, over the benches toward the preacher's stand, their horses snorting, rearing, stumbling.

And then, through the strange dull murky light she saw Mart Bladen, as drunk as any of them, shouting, half-standing in his stirrups, his revolver in one hand, his eyes blazing, but laughing—rocking with his unquenchable wild laughter! His little roan mare was white with dust and lather, and he was coatless, hatless, his shirt open at the neck, torn, crazy mad with drink and excitement and carnival. It was he and no other. She leaned, and looked, her heart beating with great gulping pauses that tore her side. She had known too well. She had known.

The band of rowdies, having arrived at their objective, seemed a little in doubt of what they should do next. The preacher's stand was empty, save for the Presiding Elder, and he stood dauntless, rather to their admiration. He would not reply to the genial blasphemies and profanings they flung at him, or try to speak above their din, even in rebuke, but stood, arms folded, neck stretched like a vulture, watching for deliverance.

And now Louellen saw that the square was nearly clear save for those who like herself stood on the benches near to some friendly tree trunk. She saw, too, that the men of the camp were forming at last, that they had heavy cudgels, that they would close in. And so, though he had humiliated her love and outraged it, though she loathed and despised him, though he had cut himself off from her forever, she had the impulse of the woman for her man. She leaped from her bench and ran through the troop; she seized Mart Bladen's bridle rein.

"Look around," she screamed. "Look! They'll get you!"

He looked down and drunken laughter fell away from him. He stretched his hand toward her, but she ran back, evad-

ing him, and he did not follow. Instead, alert, the veil of his fuddlement lifting, he saw the impending danger and marked the way of escape.

"Ho-*o!*" he called. "Gid! Matt! Zeb! Jere! Follow me! All together!"

They didn't understand, but they followed. Around the preacher's stand they went, spill and pelt, and down the back aisle toward the hinterland of darkness and scrub growth behind the tents. A woodsroad there would take them out to the county highway—Louellen knew that. But as they retreated to safety, and the pursuing men ran after them with angry, baffled cries, she dropped down on the nearest bench and burst into tears of heart-break and despair. She had saved him, but "I'm never going to have another happy day as long as I live," she sobbed.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was manifest that pursuit and capture were now impossible, and presently a semblance of order was restored. The men laid aside their rough weapons, the women pressed back into the open square. Overturned and broken benches were put to rights, damages counted. But these were negligible. Aside from a few torn dresses, some bruises, and a good bit of hysteria caused by fright and choler, there were no injuries. The timid clergy once more mounted the stand and received the biting welcome of the Presiding Elder: "It's evident we have no stuff of martyrs here." He was pinched with righteous anger, not only at the profaning of the sacred grove, but because the climax of his sermon had been spoiled and he had been unable to retaliate or punish the wicked for their disrespectful gibes and jeers. But he rallied his abashed support. "We can't let the forces of darkness triumph," he declared. "Ring the bell, and we will sing a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance, and dismiss the people in order and decency."

So the bell was rung, and in a highly electrical state what was left of the congregation settled down. Many of those who had driven in from round about had already scuttled out to their buggies and surreys, packed in their tumbled families and driven off. But the tenters remained, as did many bolder souls, and these responded to the summoning peal. The Presiding Elder had matters entirely in his own hands, and Bro' Truitt and his associates hung their diminished heads in the background. The faithful were commended for their courage under trial, the sons of Beelzebub were excoriated and their future state described in bitter detail. The justice and majesty of the Creator were extolled, the deliverance of His children from their enemies this night cited as proof of His protection. If a faint note

of criticism crept into the discourse—as for instance that His enemies were hardly sufficiently confounded and humbled not at all to the satisfaction of the truly sanctified—nevertheless, wonderful and sure are His ways, and the wages of sin will certainly, sooner or later, turn out to be death, a comforting assurance and sustaining prop to those who see sinners escape from blows and well-deserved arrest. The Presiding Elder's "Amen" was echoed all over the camp-ground. His hearers rallied to the hymn as an outlet for pent-up feeling. Jubilantly, confidently they sang Charles Wesley's stern vision of judgment terrors and judgment raptures, fit selection for the moment:

"Lift your heads, ye friends of Jesus,
Partners in his patience here:"

The Presiding Elder's voice rose once more, in finality.

"And now to Thee, Great Judge, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, we commit our weak bodies, and our striving souls, trusting in Thy goodness and mercy unto everlasting life. And may the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, and the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, rest upon and abide with you always, evermore. Amen."

An instant's reverent hush, and then the babble and clack of comment, which up until now had necessarily been suppressed, was flung to the night.

"I never in all my born days—those young rapscallions!"

"Little Eddie was right under the horses' feet but he never got a scratch. Way he hollered I thought he'd broke every bone in his body."

"Mis' Truitt tore her dress skirt into ribbons,—a good black nunsveiling."

"I lost my pa'm leaf fan and my bonnet was hanging by the strings when I reached the tent. I never see such scrouging!"

"They ought to swear out a warrant. . . ."

"It's a wonder to me they didn't break their horses' legs, right up in the benches so."

"Wasn't the Presiding Elder hopping *mad!* When he looked round and saw the others dropping off the platform and getting away I thought he's going to pop. . . ."

"The county ought to be made too hot to hold such scalawags. . . ."

"Matt Kemp rode right by me, and I could've put my hand on him."

"Oh, my! My eardrums like to burst when they got to shooting."

They nodded and palpitated, denouncing, severe. But it had been unquestionably entertaining and though no one ventured to say so, there was unspoken approval when Miss Becca Simpson, making sure that all her ruffles and ruches were intact, announced shrilly: "I'm kind of glad I've seen just how they do carry on, for once in my life, though I wouldn't care for't as a stiddy diet."

The men, however, were of stiffer stuff. Threats of prosecution were freely made. The Presiding Elder counseled it. "I'll swear to every one," said John Henry Hyde in throes of thwarted rage. Others echoed him. But when the Presiding Elder had retired, Bro' Ayres demurred, advocating moderation. "I tell you, it won't *do,"* he told the more militant. "All very well for the Presiding Elder to say prosecute,—he don't live here, and he don't know what a hornets' nest it'd stir up. You can't prosecute that gang. There'd be blood and bad feelings all over the county. They're all connected, one way or another, with good people, and come right down to it, their kin wouldn't stand to see 'em jailed. No,—we got to raise public sentiment, and get some of the repr'sent'tive men of the neighborhood to talk to 'em. Get their relatives to workin' on 'em, too. If we bull ahead and try force we'll have a lot of folks with 'em, that's agin 'em now."

"You didn't talk thataway before they come," some one reminded him, pungently.

But Bro' Ayres was not abashed. "I guess I got enough character to p'mit me to change my mind, if I see fit," he retorted. "I never was one to choose a rut when there was a good road alongside. Those boys ain't criminals, they're just young and misguided."

"And they all got votes," added Miss Becca, satirically. Laughter rippled at this, but Bro' Ayres was unmoved, and in the end carried his point.

"Well, it's my opinion," confided Mrs. West to her cronies, "that the men acted the part of weak sisters. For all their watchers and lookouts and organization, they let 'em slip right through their fingers, just as usual. I'll bet the women would've been quicker and really caught some of 'em. I wonder what's become of my girls," she added, glancing out of the tent.

Her question was answered by the appearance of Annie and Esther Dawson with their escorts. Seeing the group within the tent, they settled down in the square, an arrangement which satisfied the conventions. Young folks were permitted to stay outside a little while after late service, provided they were within earshot. The shadowy grove, dark now save for the lights from the tents, took the place of the best parlor.

Presently Rena, too, came into view with her swain and they arranged themselves a little way from the others. Louellen had not appeared, but that did not worry her mother, for John Henry would take care of her. A good many couples were still lingering in the farther square, immersed in the dimness, the dresses of the girls no more than detached clouds of pearly mist, masculine white trousers and shirt bosom triangles high light markings beside them.

Louellen had not moved from the place where she had retreated after warning Mart. Her agony of tears passed as quickly as it had come, and when a good bit later John Henry came anxiously to find her, she was sitting, dry-eyed and composed, her hands clasped in her lap, her shoul-

ders drooping. She did not look up when he sat down beside her and he thought she was angry because he had left her.

"I didn't mean to go off like that," he began, "so sudden, without a word. But I knew you were safe here and had sense enough not to get mixed up in it. By gad, I hate to think they all got away. Ungodly, shameless scoundrels. I told Bro' Ayres we ought to have a stronger party stationed at the back there, but he wouldn't take my advice. For all his talk he didn't want to capture 'em, not from the first, and now he's come out and as good's admitted it."

Still she sat silent. "Are you provoked because I left you?" he asked. "Why, Louellen, I couldn't have got you through that crowd,—you were a lot better off right here. You're so sensible. . . ."

No matter how deeply she is preoccupied by a breaking heart, the woman was never born who does not resent being called sensible. It gave Louellen an opening for reproaches. "I may be sensible," she said, "but I don't see that my sense would have got me much if the posse had closed in and there'd been a fight all around here. I'd have been caught right in it."

"I don't see *that*. You could have slipped right round to the other side, walking on the benches. Why, I had to go, Louellen. It was all agreed where we were to come together, and when we'd formed to close in. But we didn't foresee that the crowd would wash around so, and be so hard to handle. That's why we got held up. If it hadn't been for that we'd've had 'em sure, and Bro' Ayres would've had to prosecute." His voice was black with morose disappointment.

"I don't know what you expected the people would do. Sit still and let the horses trample 'em down? You should have stopped 'em before they got into the center of the camp."

"But we couldn't, I tell you, because so many of us, like me, were caught trying to get to our posts." He was

exasperated by her iteration, but he still set down her mood to resentment of his seeming neglect. "Come now, Louellen, don't hold it against me. I did what was the right thing."

"You always think you're right," she said coldly. "I don't see that this time it amounted to so much. You didn't even get your hands on one of 'em after all your big talk."

"You sound as if you were glad of it," he flung back at her. "I'll tell you this, though. Next week, after the camp breaks up, a dozen men with the sheriff at their head is going to ride around and warn these rips that this is their last time. One more spree lands them in jail, no matter whose kin they are or what wires they pull. There's going to be law and order through this county, or they'll pay for it. We know 'em, every one."

"Who were they?" she challenged. She trembled as she asked the question, but a faint quick glimmer of hope told her that perhaps every one did not know that Mart was there . . . had not seen him, as she had. She wanted him spared this public ignominy, even though he had not spared her love for him.

John Henry answered her with unction, rolling the names savoringly on his tongue. "There was Matt and Joe Kemp, Jere Willis, Jim Thomas, Zeb Williams, Jay Dodson, Al Hignutt, Gid Cummins, Haney Griffith and Mart Bladen. Every one was recognized by a hundred people."

She was utterly still, vanquished. The pronouncement of Mart's name and that he had been recognized by so many finished it. Now he was gone from her, hopelessly, beyond her resolution to recall. She wondered if another hundred people had seen her run to him, and warn him.

"I suppose it stings you," went on John Henry, hatefully, "that your particular friend was 'mongst them. But he was."

Something in his voice told her that the measure of his hate was also the measure of his suffering. She felt that

he was hurt and miserable and buffeted, by the same forces that had her at their mercy. Her anger and her resentment against him were transformed into a swift and strange pity.

"Oh," she cried, throwing out her hands in hopelessness, "why do we sit here and plague each other so? What's the use of it? I didn't mean to cut at you, John Henry. I don't know what possessed me."

His answer was as amazing as her own sudden turn of feeling. He dropped his head against her knee like a beaten child. "Don't, Louellen," he said brokenly. "Don't say things like that to me. 'S'long's you're short with me, I can stand it, your not loving me. But I can't stand your being kind."

She had never before realized him as anything but insensitive, adamant, all-sufficient, and in her own great need of solace and tenderness she found his revelation of forlornness and need piteously touching. She put her hand on his head and felt that he was shaken and distraught, disconsolate as herself, bewildered with emotion. It aroused in her a curious kinship of the soul, where before she had been separate and alien to him.

"Don't, oh, don't, don't," she begged.

"I can't help it," he whispered, still childishly. "I can't help it. I've held on and held on, but I love you too much. I love you so I'm past all holding myself. It's a sin to care so much for any earthly creature. But I can't help it," he reiterated weakly. "You drive me past all enduring," he added after a second's pause.

Louellen took impulsive, bitter resolution. She would end this for all of them, now, at this moment. Now that she knew Mart was incapable of truth, now that he had openly flouted her trust of him, shown her openly how little he cared to win her, left her humiliated, all her love for him disregarded and made nothing, she could at least save her pride, and safeguard herself from any like mischance, decide here and now to marry John Henry. He loved her,

and valued her. But Mart had dragged her roisterously in the dust of shame.

"Don't," she said again. "I'll marry you, if that's what you want."

But at his gasp of incredulous greedy joy, his violent burning seizure of her, she felt her heart, already heavy enough, drop like a plummet of lead, and her flesh go faint and cold. She had not reckoned with possession. If he had been less craving, less greedy, given her bruised spirit a refuge in tenderness and restraint, understanding, he might have won her forever at this moment. But now she was in his ravenous embrace, numb with horror of what she had done, repenting, but unable to retract; bound prisoner.

CHAPTER SIX

MART BLADEN opened sleep-drenched eyes, closed them again, stretched, rolled over, blinked at the familiar white-washed walls and maple chest of his bedroom, raised his head and made the diverting discovery that he had slept the night with his boots on. Successively he realized that he had on his trousers,—and his shirt. What there was left of it. It seemed to have suffered.

"That dam' worthless Ephum," he apostrophized the bed canopy, "I've told him a million times not to let me do this when I come home blind. Bet he didn't even wait up to stable Star."

He dropped back on his crumpled pillow and shouted: "Ephum! Ephum!" and the call was answered by swift bare feet. A black inquiring guileless face looked in at the door.

"Yessah—yessah, Mars' Mart. Heah Ephum."

"D'jou wait up for me last night?"

Ephum projected himself into the room and stood revealed in two garments of blue cotton, with a red bandana around his neck for fashion. He was explanatory but not abashed. More, he rejoiced at the chance to indulge his native loquacity.

"No sah,—yessah—dat is, didn't ezac'ly wait up, en den ergain I did. I set out by de kitchen do' 'twell mos' daylight, en I reckon I was fin'ly ovahcome by slumbrousness, foh when I wakes up wid de sun full on mah face, dah was Star, down by de wat'rin' trough, all saddle en bridle, en I peeps in heah, en heah you is, sleepin' lak kingdom come. So I ketch Star en stable her, en rub her down good en feed her en she jus' as peart ez er cricket. But you mus' a' been ridin' ha'd, dat you is." Ephum was clever enough to present the cared-for Star first to her master's attention.

"Yes—I was riding—" Mart was still scarcely awake, but he swung himself to the side of the bed, looked down at his tattered disorder. "You go roll one of the washtubs—a big one—into the back hall and fill it up with cold water," he ordered. "And hustle."

"Yessah—but Sally, she usin' de washtubs—" Ephum made no case, but merely presented the fact.

"Well, you empty one of 'em and do like I tell you."

Ephum hastened away, and Mart pulled himself up from the bed, straightened, raised his arms, and with fingertips against the ceiling, pulled out and braced his supple muscles. His room was part of the old house built by the first Bladen, with handhewn timbers, deep window embrasures and low ceiling. After he had limbered himself sufficiently he began to strip and presently stood mother naked, rubbing his arms, fighting off the need of sleep that still engulfed him. There was a painful black bruise on his thigh, and he laid a questioning finger on it.

"How in time did I get that!" he murmured. As yet he had no very clear recollection of the night before. But now, as drowsiness reluctantly receded, he began to remember.

He had ridden out, restless, in the forenoon, but he had kept away from beaten paths and familiar haunts where he would be most apt to meet the cronies he had forsworn. Half way down the causeway he was overtaken by Gid Cummins, galloping carefree with a loose rein and genial humor. He had hailed Mart with joy and invited him to drop in and taste some very superior early cider, just made from his crop of molasses crabapples.

Mart objected. "I'm not aiming to get tight to-day," he had laughed, waving the other off.

"You can't get tight on this cider," Gid said. "She ain't even begun to turn. She's almost sickenin' sweet. Next week, now, she'll be ra'ring."

There had seemed to be no valid reason why Mart should shy at cider which had not begun to turn. So he had tasted and the first cup of its smooth sweetness had misled him

as to its potency. They had sat under the sycamore before Gid's house, and talked, and had another cup of cider, and then Gid had suggested that they get a piece of ice from his ice-house, and chill some of it—he thought it might not taste so sickenin' sweet if it was colder. So they had swaggered down the hill to the ice-house, invaded its dark coolth, hoisted out a great sawdust-covered cube of ice, and set the pitcher of cider on it, and presently tried again. And again. And again. When the pitcher was empty and the ice largely melted, there was no question but they must go over to Kemps' and tell Matt and Joe about it, and Mart had forgotten all about his resolution not to get tight. By this time he was in a state of high and powerful exhilaration, with the whole world his golden plaything. The only thing he couldn't understand was why he had never planted an orchard of molasses crabs for himself.

At the Kemps' there was the regular Sunday spree in full swing, with Tillie Kemp peering fearfully from the back porch, a couple of scared, untidy children clinging to her skirts. The revelers had welcomed Mart hilariously, and to celebrate his return to the fold after two weeks of absence Joe Kemp brought out some of his five-year-old apple-jack, that fiery, heady brandy of the clearest, palest straw-color, with an aroma that holds all the glorified soul of the fruit. They drank it neat. The consequence was even as had been told at the camp-meeting, whoopings and yellings that scandalized the passers-by, terrified Tillie into momentary rebellion, and culminated in the raid on the Harmony camp-ground.

Mart pulled it all out of his memory, bit by bit, up to that glorious drunken ride through the night, the funny way that people had squawked and run, Star's cleverness and sure-footedness among the unsteady benches, and the more careless horsemanship of the others in the gang. He remembered their headlong escape, through the woodsroad with the low crowding tree branches lashing across them as they fled. But it was not until he was standing in the tub of

cold water, and Ephum, under direction, was sluicing him down with more of the refreshing flood, that he recalled Louellen.

He started and winced as from sudden pain. "Dat too cole?" asked Ephum with instant sympathy.

"No—no," said Mart, recovering himself. "Go get another bucketful and pour it over my head." He stood still in the tub listening to Ephum's flat hastening footsteps, the vigorous creaking of the pump-handle. The ensuing deluge vanquished the last of his slumber, and brought back all of his memory.

He stepped out of the tub, rubbed himself with the heavy hard towels that he loved, brought up the blood under his fair skin. Then he went back to his room for clean clothes. "Tell Sally to have me my breakfast ready when I come out," he directed Ephum, as he went. But he did not know that he had said the words. He was moving mechanically, his mind wholly intent on the picture of Louellen, her face pale with distress and keen with reproach, running to him, and warning him that he might be trapped. He didn't know what had become of her. She had drawn back into the obscurity whence she had come. But the fact remained. Louellen had seen him drunk and on the loose. Louellen knew. And he had promised her faithfully, he had sworn . . . but there, he would explain. He would tell her just what had happened, how he had got into it all unawares, and not by intention. He would guarantee that this was positively the last time, that he would never, never again be such a fool as to touch cider when he didn't know its date. He formed arguments, reasons, excuses, and assured himself that these would be sufficient. But there was a brackish doubt in his mind.

"Judas Priest!" he swore, as he slipped into smooth refreshing linen, "I'm the damnedest fool! What'd I listen to Gid for? And drink all that swill!"

Yet for the life of him he could not feel overwhelmingly troubled, or even particularly repentant, he was too unac-

customed to such emotions. He strode out to breakfast, his boot heels echoing jauntily on the bare boards. The carpets of his mother's day had long ago vanished. His sisters had carried off the finer furniture, but Mart was content with his scrubbed floors, his whitewash, his plain chests and cupboards and tables, his uncurtained windows, and his ironstone china. The beds were comfortable to sleep in. And Sally was a superlative cook. These, after all, were the essentials.

He ate crisp, fried side-meat, brown and sweet, from his own smokehouse, and hoe-cakes made of meal and salt and water, patted flat by Sally's capacious palms and baked to a delicious nuttiness on a board before the kitchen fireplace, in the old-fashioned way. Sally would not use the good cookstove that had been his mother's pride, so whatever she cooked had the savor of the red embers, a little tang of wildness that came from the heart of the burning logs, hickory, oak.

Mart swam his hoe-cakes in butter, washed them down with boiled coffee that had been cleared with whites of eggs and into its fragrant black poured yellow cream, sluggish in its richness. There was cut sugar to sweeten it, and a bowl of roasted Gravensteins, windfalls, waited until his appetite was sated with the heavier food.

Tall tulip trees close around the house kept it in as cool a shade as the sunshine beyond was fiery. A fair day, hot but not oppressive, the sky beyond the greenness a blazing steady ultramarine, impenetrably far, yet with a friendly nearness where it lightened at the horizon and dropped behind the fringe of pine woods that everywhere made a boundary for vision. Mart, observing it, hastily planned his course.

The camp-meeting would break up to-day. The tenters would load their furniture into farmwagons for their servants to drive home and they would follow in buggies and carryalls. It would be a leisurely, unhurried process, and would occupy the greater part of the day, even for those

who lived reasonably near the camp-ground. And the Wests were ten miles from it. There would not be the least chance that he could see Louellen to-day, then. Possibly not to-morrow, for as likely as not Rena would go home with her and stay a day or so longer, so easy were the ways of local hospitality. Yet, if he could get word to her, she might slip off and come down to the beech-tree, say, to-morrow. He mused on ways and means, but could see nothing immediate. He must wait, and he hated waiting.

And there were certain persistent qualms—Louellen was such a strict little rascal, she'd walk into him, he knew it. But when she saw how ashamed he was, how genuinely sorry, how this was the last, the very last time, and no mistake about it, it would be all right. It would have to be all right. He whistled as he left the table, his buoyancy rising.

"Hi Betty Martin, tiptoe, tiptoe—
Hi Betty Martin, tiptoe fine!"

Silly and Spot gamboled round him at the sound, as light of heart as he. Just for the delight of his own controlled body, he ran and leaped the wide box hedge that made division between the front yard and the back, disdaining the open gate. The dogs leaped after him, barking, ecstatic.

Ephum and Sally exchanged pleased comment at the sight.

"Frisky ez a two-year-ole! Ain' he de beatines'!"

"Sho is. Ah certney do lak to see him all tune up how-come-ye-so, en so limber look lak he made outen inja rubber. Hark at dem dawgs—ain' dey happy?"

"Dey all happy. Ah'm glad he bus' loose ergin. Tain' nachel fer a gamesome young buck lak Marse Mart ter pent hissef up en live lak he was Methusalum,—no sah."

"Lessee—thishyer's de firs' time he been out rampagin' fer mighty nigh three weeks. Ah doan neveh reckerlec sech a long spell er dry weddeh befo' sence he was knee-high."

They joined in the rich loose laughter of the negro. They

loved him and served him with as much devotion as was compatible with the minimum of effort. They gauged him with that expert cunning which is the negro's best asset in dealing with white men. They were resilient to his moods, easing him through them.

Mart went swinging on to the stables, looked at Star, but sparing her, took out another horse for riding over the farm, old Doll, his first mount, now saved for just such easy going. She nickered with the joy of his presence, nuzzled him moistly, glad of his touch, his voice.

"Here's one lady pleased to see me, anyway," he chuckled, rubbing her velvet ears,—and at the sound Star stretched out a jealous little head from the adjoining stall, so that he must go over and pet her into content.

So clear, so still was the air that he seemed to ride in a vacuum cupped in crystal. The faint dust raised by Doll's feet did not rise to his stirrups. The sun beat on him and gave his brown hair some of its gold. It was wonderful to be alive and quick in this living heat, to feel the responsive horse beneath him, to see Silly and Spot ranging alongside with adoring eyes turned up to him, their red tongues lolling. In the grass by the lane shrill resonant crickets played him along with their persistent fiddles, and far off he could hear locusts' swift, thin dry trill like a hard-shaken tambourine. Yellow pollen, pale and fragrant, spilled on Doll's legs from trampled feathery grass, and there was the pungent fragrance of bruised horse-mint, purple and bronze, coarse-textured, in the green. And above, and over and through it all, the hot sunshine of late summer, that seems all tenderness, serene in its expended power, its fulfilled fecundity,—no more the fervent, exigent lover of the spring.

Mart Bladen looked with satisfaction over his fields. His wheat had been heavy, his corn would be as good as any in the county. He rode all the way out to the fence that divided John Henry Hyde's land from his own, and looked long at the corn on the other side. He marked with jocular satisfaction certain stalks on John Henry's side of the fence

that were warped and blemished with smut, while his own crop was clean.

"'Taint neighborly of John Henry, letting smut get out in his corn. Ought a' used more judgment with his seed," he told Doll, who pricked her ears to listen, as if she understood.

The field hands were busy with odd jobs, grubbing out an old orchard, ditching the little stream that watered his pasture, breaking a patch of new ground. He had decided to do these now because other work was slack. The fodder would be ready for stripping next week, then they would all go into that. His hay was stacked, his wheat was threshed, fanned and sacked, long since. With his thoughts still harking back uneasily to Louellen, he decided that he would lay off two of the hands in the afternoon and let them do some cleaning up around the house where he had already begun a rather aimless renovation, uncertain as to just what she would like to have done, and not accustomed to the process himself.

Still—there was a rough patch of high weeds and briers back in behind the old grape arbor that might be mowed down with the scythe. One man could do that, and another could take the light wagon and go over to the sawmill for lumber to be used in repairs for the arbor, for the steps, for the kitchen lattice about the pump. This he planned, then rode far down the pasture to see his young cattle, stamping, tail-waving against the flies, in the shade. A likely bunch, Jersey blood. They'd bring a pretty penny in the fall. He singled out one, a young brown bull, that he would keep.

His progress was easy, his face untroubled, but now and then a keen flicker of doubt touched him. Louellen . . . and last night! He wished her eyes had not looked so big and scared and shadowy. He wished her face had not seemed so sharp with dismay; he wished that she had said something to him besides the warning. It was brave of her to warn him.

"I hope none of the pious old tongue-waggers saw her," he thought, glowering. "They'd buzz like a nest of hornets. 'Twouldn't make old Amos West love me any better neither." Genially he invited God to damn old Amos West's hide-bound narrow notions, and all the other old sour-faces who thought as Amos West did. Through these suggestions he was achieving a certain tension. If he could only canter his accustomed way down the river road and find Louellen under the beech tree, make his confession, sue for forgiveness! But this waiting, this not knowing when he'd be able to see her—it got him. Louellen could be thundering hard, if she wanted. Not that he didn't deserve it, oh yes, he ought to be cow-hided for being such an eternal triple damned fool,—but he had no notion of the mechanics of cause and effect, retribution, punishment, for himself. The faintest prospect of denial disconcerted, dismayed him.

He bolstered his jangling nerves with the assurance that Louellen had always come round before,—so she'd do it again. Only . . . *why* had she looked at him last night from such a weary distance, made him so alien to her? He had not been so far gone in drink not to feel that something cataclysmic had happened to Louellen in seeing him thus.

He sighed impatiently. It hadn't been any fun—real fun—stampeding the camp-meeting. Tame. Stupid. Flat. It occurred to him, as it has to many men before him and to many since, that there is a frightful lack of imagination in jamborees. It was getting to be almost as driveling to be a sinner as to be a saint.

"I'm ripe to marry and settle down," he decided, turning Doll's head at last toward home. "That's what's the matter with me. Matt and Joe Kemp and the rest of 'em are all *right*. O. K. boys and plenty of life, but they keep at this thing too steady. Once in a while's enough."

He recalled uneasily Tillie Kemp's scared, meager face, and with an access of mental qualms recognized that it had something of the same look that Louellen had turned to him as she caught at his bridle rein. He drew the back of his

hand hard across his eyes to rub away the gray accusing memory of that look.

But it increased, it remained with him. He ate his dinner with slight appetite, and set impatiently about the direction of the two men he had taken from the fields. One rattled away in the light wagon, bound for the sawmill, and the regular swish-ish and swoop of the other's scythe could presently be heard in the indicated thicket. Mart ranged about, restless. At last he took hammer and nails, and set himself to futile but time-filling tinkering. There was a certain relief in pounding nails.

Presently he was summoned by Sally: "Somebody ridin' in," she announced, importantly. "Maybe it's supper company." She did not go back to the house, but headed toward the barn, as was customary. She would catch and kill a pair of chickens for supper on the mere chance of a guest. If the guests did not stay, she and Ephum would, nevertheless, have a special meal. So ran Sally's perfectly logical reasoning.

When Mart reached the house a buggy had just stopped by the horse block, and he hailed the man and girl in it with unfeigned pleasure.

"Ches' and Della! You're a sight for sore eyes. Light and come in, both of you. Golly, but I'm thankful to have an excuse to stop working."

Della Layton, slender and active, jumped out of the buggy, laughing nervously. She had the wide appealing eyes and drooping lips of the very sensitive, and she was spoiled and apt to be petulant if her will was crossed. The local judgment of Della Layton was that her father and mother had babied her so much that she couldn't stand it not to be humored in every whim. She had been a delicate child, ten years younger than her last robust brother, and it was true that the whole family had united to spoil and pet her.

"I reckon you weren't working so hard," she said, following Mart up to the chairs on the front porch. Ches, after

tying the horse, joined them, a stocky, square, good-humored man, as slow and steady as Della was elusive and active.

"Quite some rig you and the Kemp boys and the rest of y' was running last night," he said humorously.

"We were blind," admitted Mart, grinning. "Were you out there, either of you?"

"We were both there," said Della. "I got Ches to take me over right after supper, for the evening meeting. Oh, we saw you."

The two men surveyed each other with understanding. This was nothing to be talked about before a woman.

"You cert'ney do pull Ches around by the ear, Della," said Mart, ignoring the last part of her remarks. "Everywhere you want to go he has to take you. I don't know what you'll ever do when you get married—you'll never find a husband as easy-going as Ches is."

Della tossed her head. "Everybody says that—but when I get married I guess I can manage the man."

"'N if you can't you'll be running home asking buddy to come help you," teased Mart.

"Not me," rumbled Ches. "Hands off married folks, I say."

Mart flung back his head and laughed. Then, mindful of hospitality, he called for Ephum. When he appeared, at his usual shuffling run, Mart said: "Mix up a couple nice frosted juleps and bring a glass of buttermilk for Miss Della. Unless you'd rather have shrub. Sally made some first-rate tasting raspberry shrub this summer. No? Well, the buttermilk, then. And if Sally's got any cake——"

"Quite the housekeeper, aren't you?" said Della, mockingly.

"You bet you," replied Mart, undisturbed. "I'm a reg'ler dyed-in-the-wool, set-in-my-ways old bach, been keeping liberty hall so long, nobody to give me any orders, or take my money, or sit up for me when I come home late."

Della received these strictures on the state of marriage with a slight sniff. She was ill at ease, restless. Her hands picked at her dress and hat ribbons.

Presently came Ephum with a tray, the juleps, frosted, cold, with little forests of crisp mint above the pale mist of the glass; the buttermilk a foamy cream; a plate of sand-tarts, pale brown discs, dotted with almonds.

"Drink hearty, Ches," said Mart, lifting his glass.

"Hair of the dog that bit you," responded Ches, and his good-natured little eyes smiled knowingly through the mint.

"Sally makes the best sand-tarts I ever ate," said Della, with that tinge of resentment that all women feel toward the comforts of an unmarried man's establishment. "I'd like to get her recipe, but I know she wouldn't give it to me." She fidgeted about, crumbled her cake. The piece of news she had brought fairly burnt her tongue. She was dying to tell it, to see how it would affect Mart. She could refrain from it no longer. "So you're going to have a new neighbor," she said, and the hand that held the glass of buttermilk twitched. She watched him sharply.

"That so—has Salisbury sold his farm?" asked Mart, with interest. "I hadn't heard—didn't know he wanted to."

"No—I mean—on the other side."

Both men were looking at her with surprise now. She was very white and she could hardly sit still. Her eyes were glazed with nervous tears.

"Nothing happened to John Henry, I hope," said Mart. "I like to have somebody pious next door to kind of even up things along with my back-sliding."

Della made a hard effort to control herself. She sat straight, winked her eyes to drive back tears and spoke louder than usual. "Oh, then you *haven't* heard. You didn't know he and Louellen West are going to get married. Fact. I heard it before we left the camp-ground last night. Seems they just settled it and John Henry was so entranced he had to tell it around." She paused, unable to control her trembling lips.

There was an embarrassed silence. "You didn't say anything to me about it," murmured Ches, awkwardly.

"Didn't I?" she asked with bright innocence. "That's funny—I meant to. But it slipped my mind till just this minute."

This was so plainly a lie that Ches looked indignant, but the habit of humoring Della was strong upon him and he did not try to rebuke or refute her. Mart had not said a word, only sat a little straighter, and turned curiously grave. But at last he spoke.

"Well, now, that's real interesting," he said slowly. "Real interesting. I'd always kind of depended on John Henry to keep me in countenance, baching it right here along side of me, but I s'pose I'll have to go it alone now."

Della could not resist trying to finger his emotions. "She's been real sly about it, I should say, letting on she didn't care anything about him. I don't know why anybody's so crazy about her, at that,—she's not pretty, and she's so quick-spoken—"

"I always thought she was a real pretty girl," said Ches, distressed, intent to save the situation. "I never had no use for John Henry. I shouldn't wonder if you were mistaken, sis,—maybe you got the news mixed up with somebody else."

Della tossed her head. "Oh, no, I didn't. But I'm surprised Mart here hadn't heard it—you know we always thought you were kind of sweet on Louellen, Mart."

Mart got up, walked to the porch rail and spat over it.

"I wasn't exactly in the right state to hear all the camp gossip when I was out there last night, Della," he said, with the effect of lightness, "so I take it as mighty kind of you to hurry over here to-day and let me know. Yes,—mighty kind and cousinly." He gazed at her, stony-eyed, as from a great distance.

He confused, frightened her, and she betrayed the motive of it, the reason behind her haste and her excitement. "Oh, Mart—I didn't want to make you mad," she cried, "I just

wanted you to know she—she wasn't worth—what you think about her. She's two-faced—and false-hearted—and—" She burst into tears.

Mart and Ches avoided each other's eyes. The avowal of the girl's feeling was so open, so unmistakable, that the two men could not bear it. They felt that it was not decent of them to see it.

"Della's not been feeling right well," said Ches. "The hot weather and all. She never could stand hot weather. Come on, sis—we ought to get home—"

He took her arm, helped her to rise and half-led her to the buggy. Mart stood still. He knew Ches did not want him to speak or to act. Watching them, Della's drooping slightness, her crushed blue ruffles, made her seem like a broken flower, or a storm-tossed fallen butterfly, and Mart struggled with bewildered pity and a sense of shame for her. He had always known that she liked him too much, and had instinctively sheered away from a feeling he could not return. But to-day, it had been so plain,—and before Ches. . . . He shook his head. Women were unaccountable creatures. . . .

But what she had said about Louellen. . . . He came back from his pity and his bewilderment with a snap, like the click of a gun-trigger. She must have heard *something.* It pushed his apprehension too far. He could never wait until to-morrow to know. In three minutes he had gone to the stables, chosen a wicked young horse that he only rode when he wanted to make speed, and put the beast to its best gait for the seven-mile ride to Amos West's place.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE road was heavy sand, the seven miles unending. The day, so full of sunshine in the morning, had rolled up a storm promise, lowering and heavy with dim thunder at the North. This faced Mart as he rode, and its close heat, its mutterings, its occasional lightning, were prophecies of evil. It was strange and bitter to him to take this road which he had always ridden with a light heart, and hurry over it in fear and acute misgiving. All that he had delighted in—woods-smell of sassafras and aromatic pine, flash of a goldfinch over a thistle, pokeberry clusters dripping rich purple blood, tawny marsh lilies and cool fronds of fern, quivering jewel-like bloom of touch-me-not,—these he did not see. He was riding with fear on his crupper and the strange weight drew him from all else.

He would go straight to Louellen, demand an answer. If Amos West was there and tried to bar him, so much the worse for Amos West.

"If he crosses me I'll drag him out and lock him in his own stable till I've had my say and know the truth," he promised himself, and felt his muscles tighten pleasantly in anticipation. "And if John Henry's round and puts his nose in I'll do as much for him." His lips drew back over his teeth. He had a stout consciousness that he could fight and lick the world if it would bring him through to her.

He did not take the river road, but went straight on his way to the house. There must be no sneaking round by back fences to-day. He was going in at the front door.

The West house sat on a little rise in the land, called by courtesy a hill in this hill-less country, back from the road, as is customary with Eastern Shore farmhouses, at the end of a long lane bordered with blackheart cherries, set in pairs like sentinels. Beyond these, at each side, cornfields. The

house showed white at the end of the long tunnel of green, a plain house, two windows at each side of a door sheltered by a small square porch, and above, five windows. All the shutters were bowed for coolness and shade and this made the house look at him with blind unfriendly eyes. But the front door was open, and through it he could see into a hall, and beyond to the back veranda that bordered the ell. Women's voices drifted out to him as he lifted his hand to knock and he stood still. They had come back from camp, then.

". . . take this upstairs. . . ." He caught the words and with them Louellen came into the hall from a side door and faced him. She was carrying a bandbox with gay pictures about it, in one hand, but the other she threw up before her as if to fend him off. Then she came slowly toward him, and he saw again that fugitive likeness to kicked and spiritless Tillie Kemp—a likeness of the soul, not of the flesh. And it hurt him so that he could not speak, only returned her stare as if she were a stranger.

Then came her voice, quiet, almost flat. "Well—Mart—"

He put out his hands to her, but she shook her head and drew back. He stepped into the hall beside her, swinging the screen door shut behind him quietly.

"I hear you're going to marry John Henry Hyde," he said.

"Who told you?"

"Seems he passed the word to some people last night at the camp—and they were riding by, and stopped in, and told me. It's not so, is it, Louellen?"

She still looked at him with that strange, quiet look. "Yes, it's so. I told him I would, last night, after you—"

There was something queer about the house, about her calmness. It seemed to put a spell on him. He couldn't breathe. But he broke away from it.

"Louellen, I was drunk, I was drunk. I didn't know what I was doing—I never meant to touch a drop. I just got going, and I couldn't hardly recollect, this morning,

where I'd been or what I'd been up to. Only I remembered you, looking up at me, and telling me to get out. What'd you do that for, Louellen, if you felt thisaway about me? Why didn't you let the constables take me, take us all?"

"Oh, I couldn't let 'em do that!" broke from her involuntarily.

"But that's not what I come about. Louellen, you wouldn't throw me downstairs just because I broke out this once! I'll never do it again. You're—you're not going to hold this against me, to keep to what you said—" It was too monstrous, too incredible. His confidence revived. "Why, you're my girl, Louellen, you know it. I've sparked around here and there, but you've held me steady and true. I never asked any other girl to marry me, nor ever will. I'm ashamed of last night—I'm ashamed to think I didn't have more sense than to get so much liquor aboard, but surely, for just that once—" He was walking up and down, talking loud, careless of who heard him. The sense of queerness, of something subtle and malign that he could not define, persisted. He did not know it, but it was the touch of John Henry Hyde on Louellen. But she knew, and she could only stand away from him, the bandbox dropped beside her, and clench her nails into the flesh of her hands.

"Mart," she said, "Mart! You promised me faithfully. And then, last night, you were as drunk as the worst of 'em. So I knew,—it wasn't any use—" She was remotely hostile, as though the scene wearied her and she wished to be done with it. But Tillie Kemp again looked out of her eyes, and abased him.

"But I keep telling you, it was only this once, and I got into it before I knew it. I didn't intend to. Louellen,—you won't forgive me? What's got into you? What's back of all this? Has somebody been telling you lies about me?"

He changed his plea: "Send me away if you want to, but don't marry John Henry. I might be able to bear it if you went off to somebody who was a better man than I am. But he's not. He's cold-blooded. He's cruel. He's

stingy. He's mean. You don't know him—you think because he goes to church and passes the plate and don't take any liquor or hell around any that he's all right. Louellen—"

"It isn't any use for you to take on so. It's done."

He seized her in his arms and crushed her up to him, pressing his heated young body against her roughly, as if to warm her out of her cold and enduring apathy. "I won't let you," he said, his lips against her cheek, against her hair, her ear. "It's our whole lives you're ruining, Louellen. You're mine and I'll keep you. I'll never let anybody else have you as long as I live. Say you forgive me—about last night—I'll never get drunk again, so help me God. Louellen, sweetness—"

He loosed her as suddenly as he had taken her, feeling the hopelessness of it. He might have been holding a dead woman. "There's something funny about all this," he said. "You act like something had changed you, somehow. You don't even look the same. What've they done to you, honey-love? Has your father and mother been at you? Did they persuade you?"

She wanted to call to him, to shriek at him—"You didn't love me,—you didn't love me!" but she couldn't. The weight of the chains that John Henry Hyde had put on her stifled her, held back her heart from its expression. She could only look at him and shake her head. "It's not anything but what I told you. I've passed my word, and I'll keep it."

"But Louellen," he went on, studying her, "wasn't it so what you told me the last time we met down at the beech-tree? Were you just fooling with me, playing fast and loose, with me and John Henry both, and then finally making up your mind to take him? Didn't you care anything about me? Were you just putting it on? God-a-mighty, I'd kill anybody who'd tell me such a thing about you, and now you stand there all drawn into yourself and as good as admit it's so."

He seemed infinitely young to her in his earnestness, his appealing. She had thought that he did not love her, that he had made light of her, had broken his word knowingly, carelessly,—and in the agony of shame in which she had found herself she had taken the wrong way out. But she could not retrace her steps. To break from the corrosive passion of John Henry Hyde was more than she had strength for. She knew it. She had trapped herself. She was no longer free. Unwittingly, desperately unhappy, she had committed herself so decisively that there was no withdrawal. Well . . . she must make it clear to Mart . . . and she would not let him know how much she loved him. That little rag of silence she would leave to cover her pride. Now all she wanted was to get him away, out of her sight, so that she need not be tortured by his pleading.

"It's no use for you to take on, Mart. I told you. When you rode in there last night, drunk and dirty and wild, carrying on just as bad as the Kemps and Gid and the rest of 'em, I knew you didn't want to keep your promise to me. You said—but we're just going over the same thing. It's all settled, I tell you. I'm going to marry John Henry. Maybe he's not quite so light and fancy as some—but—" She could not go on. She could not honestly defend John Henry to Mart. But she had the bleak tight-lipped look of Amos West himself, and defied him with it, covered with it the secret of her heart. Let him think she had done it only because he had broken his word. Then he would never suspect that she knew she had loved him more than he loved her.

"Louellen—good Lord—how can you do it! I've loved you—I've been right at your heels begging for a kind word or a look, like I was a little dog, for close to two years—you know—it's those damned religious notions of yours that have got you—" He broke off quickly. Some one was coming toward them along the back porch.

"Company? . . . Who is it?" asked Jane West, leaning and peering from the light into the darker hallway. She

came on in to them. *"Mart Bladen!* Well, my soul alive!" Words failed her, but the instinct to hospitality did not. "Won't you come in and set down?" she asked, mechanically opening the parlor door, and looking from one to the other with searching incredulous eyes.

"No'm, thank you," said Mart. The interruption baffled him, but he did not propose to end the moment thus. "I just wanted to see Louellen a minute. I came in as I was riding by." He held his ground, and there was something so utterly mystifying about the situation, something so stifling and combative in the air, that Jane West retreated.

"Oh,—" she said. "Oh—well!" And left them alone again.

"Louellen," he begged. "I can't go away and leave things all unsettled like this. Come down and meet me at the beech tree to-morrow—late."

"No."

"Next day, then, or the day after. I'll wait down there every afternoon till you want to see me. To-morrow—and all the week. I—Louellen—look here, honey, no matter what you do I'll wait for you till I die. I know you're all upset and provoked at me now,—but when you've thought it over a little you'll see different."

"No. I won't. It isn't any use."

He was not used to being checked, denied. He could not feel the reality of it. All this had something the quality of a bad dream, it was as if she did not hear what he was saying, that there was some barrier between them that he could not pierce through.

"I'll wait at the beech-tree to-morrow," he went on persuasively, "and all week. Or, if you can't get there, send me word, by anybody, and I'll travel the longest and the worst road in the world to reach you." He could not be sure that Jane West, though she had so considerately removed herself from sight, had likewise gone out of hearing. He *must* go. He caught Louellen's hand and would have kissed it, but she dragged it from him.

"You go away, Mart. And stay away. I don't want to see you or hear tell of you again. I put my trust in you, and you broke your word, as if I was nothing. I couldn't trust you again even if I wanted to and said I would. I'd always be afraid . . . and watching . . . and wondering. . . ."

It was so baffling, so unfair. She was strengthening her resolution against him, he could see that. And there was no defense.

"But it was only that once," he protested again, but hopelessly, "and you're breaking up my life—and yours, too—just for what? You've got no real reason to back it up. What's between you and me is bigger'n any promise about getting drunk or not—and you know it. But you won't say so. Oh, Christ, no! You stand there and don't hardly raise an eyelash and talk about broken promises and forgiving and not forgiving like you was God. Maybe, in one way, you are God—God's the fellow that can damn you down to hell, isn't He? Just as sure as the two of us stands here, that's what you're doing to me. But I tell you right now I'd rather be going to my hell than to yours—" The blast of anger choked back in his throat at the look she turned on him, from the depth of her torn and tormented spirit.

"Maybe that's so. Good-by, Mart."

She picked up the bandbox and went upstairs, leaving him standing alone in the hall. There was nothing for him to do but go.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"PASSEL of gemmen ridin' in," announced Sally, importantly. She had come out of the kitchen to the grape arbor where Mart was doggedly nailing new supports in place. He had gone on with these repairs because it gave him something to do, and kept him at home alone. He wanted the solitude, but he could not have borne it had it included inactivity.

For three fair mornings he had measured and sawed and nailed with unsparing energy, and the work was nearly at an end. In the afternoons he had waited fruitlessly at the beech tree, and ridden home in a state of depression each day worse than the last. He was losing hope. Only this morning he had debated with himself whether he should ride over again, or whether he should try another visit to the house. Perhaps he would write her a letter. But he was unused to letter-writing and distrusted it. He could not say what he wanted on paper. He had come to no decision, and Sally's announcement made a break. He went impatiently to the house—probably it was the Kemps, or Gid Cummins, come to talk over the Sunday escapade, and plan for another. He wished them all in the bottom of the river.

But it was not his cronies. Instead he saw an unfamiliar group of men on horseback, and one in a buggy, Sheriff Stevens, a little bent man with a game leg but a fighting spirit. Behind him were Amos West, Doctor Tithelow, Henry Jarrell and Robert Nuttle, the latter two substantial farmers and churchmen, and James Boone, a local justice. Last of all Leonidas Ayres, frankly uneasy. He had been coerced into coming, and showed it.

"Light, gentlemen, and come in," said Mart cordially, but his hand closed tight around the hammer handle. He

had forgotten to drop the tool. He kept his eyes on them, he was cool, smiling, unconcerned.

The little sheriff's face was not unfriendly. It would have been impossible for any one of gallantry himself to dislike the straight youth before them in his clean linen, his hair blown boyishly over his forehead.

"No, Mart, thank y'; reckon we won't light," said the sheriff, "but we dropped in to give y' a word of warning. No more sprees like last Sunday. It's going against the good name of the county. Over in Kent and Talbot they're saying we're lawless, that we've not the proper respect for religion, that we can't control our wild elements. So we're riding round to them that took part in the affair over at Harmony Camp to let 'em know that it don't go. Now, Mart, as one man to another,—ain't we in the rights of it?"

Mart's fingers relaxed on the hammer, he came down the steps, and his smile was now part relief and part ingratiating apology. "I expect you have, sheriff," he said blithely. "I've not been feeling none so proud of myself. Seems like I was old enough to've climbed fool's hill before this, but looks like I got to the top of it last Sunday. I was drunk, blind,—and that's the whole of it."

Amos West leaned forward in his saddle, swelling with righteous wrath: "Yes, and we ought by rights to shut your worthless whisky-soaked carcass——"

"You go plumb to hell," broke in Mart. "The sheriff can arrest me if he's a mind to, but I'm not going to be jawed and slung dirty names at by any three feet of Methodist whiskers, not now, nor never."

Amos West would have flung himself off his horse, but Ayres and Jarrell restrained him, expostulating. A flicker of grim humor appeared on the sheriff's wizened face and he winked an understanding eye at Mart. "Hold up, there," he said. "No need you slinging mud either, seems to me. And mind what I'm telling you, for this warning's for your own good, and you'll not get off so light the next time."

"There won't be no next time for me, sheriff," said Mart. "I know 's well as you do we went too far. You can count on what I say."

The sheriff tightened his reins preparatory to turning. "Fair enough," he answered. "Fair enough spoken. Keep to it and you're all hunkydory."

They rode down the lane, Amos West still muttering thunder. Doctor Tithelow, at the gate, halted in speech a moment with the others and then rode slowly back. He was a square, thick man, sleepy-eyed, darkly ruddy, with a thick sardonic mouth. Some day he would be very fat. He got stiffly off his horse, and came up on the porch.

"Set down, Doc," said Mart. "Seems right funny to me to see you out as an instrument of the godly. Why don't you go on with the rest of 'em to the Kemps' and so forth? I s'pose they're headed for the full round."

The doctor disposed himself in a rocking chair: "What made you blatt out at Amos so brash and unnecessary?" he asked. "Bad blood betwixt you?"

Mart swung his feet lazily over the side of his chair. "Not special,—only why couldn't he talk like a man, like the sheriff did, instead of lambasting me with chunks of the Old Testament? And what'd you come back for, anyway?"

They were old friends, these two, and there was an easy understanding between them. "Oh, I had a call out this way and when the committee come around and asked me to ride with 'em, as a leading citizen and prominent man, you understand, I thought I'd come along as far as here. I wanted to hear what they said to you and how you took it. I knew your father and mother pretty well, Mart. I brought you into the world—you were my first local baby case, and I was scared to death about you, for I was green as grass, just out of Hahneman, so I got a particular interest in you. I saw Amos was ready to vent his spleen, and I didn't know what might happen with a hot-head like you. I thought I'd like to be round, that was all."

There was real affection, inarticulate, but sweet, in the words, though he had said them in his usual barking, rough voice, his face staring without expression toward the county road.

"That was right kind of you, Doc," said Mart. "Right kind. I—appreciate it." The Doctor's speech was balm to his loneliness and bewilderment.

Fell a pleasant silence. Then Doctor Tithelow, sniffing slightly, cocked a questioning eye: "Is that a mint-bed I smell round here somewheres?"

Mart called Ephum: "Doc, here, thinks our well water's kind of brackish, but he's powerful thirsty. Better mix him up a julep."

"Must've had a right rousing time over at the Camp Sunday night from all I hear," said the Doctor presently.

"Middling."

"You're a pretty crop of young hellions, you are. It's all right for the Kemps, and some of the others,—but don't you keep at it too long. You can get too much liquor, you know. I'm not opposed to liquor, by no manner of means, used with discretion and for pleasure. Fact is, lots more people eat themselves to death than drink themselves to death. But you, you young fool, trying to swill all the liquor in the state—it's hoggish."

"Now lookahere, Doc—I've not had any of your share yet—"

"You better not. Bad enough to have the country going straight to the dogs under a black Republican President! I couldn't stand much more trouble. But you ease up on liquor, boy, I tell you."

"It don't matter what I do," said Mart, in a sudden burst of bitterness.

The Doctor conceded so much. "Don't know as it does,—to anybody else, that is. But speaking as a physician, I'll tell you flat that it'll make a lot of difference to you, yourself, thirty years from now whether you go on loading up on bellywash, or not. Keep sound teeth and a sound liver,

Mart, and you can laugh at the world and go it lively till you're ninety. But shucks,—who ever listens to a doctor unless he'd bedrid. Well, I must be riding."

Mart did not want to let him go. "I wish you'd stay. Stay to dinner, can't you? Or anyway, set still and have another julep. Ephum'll mix 'em till his arm wears off, and glad to."

"Boy, what was all that good advice about drinking I was just giving you? No, I can't stay. Wish I could. All Brady Weaver's young ones are down with the measles, and I promised I'd be there before dinner. Ride in town and eat supper with me some time soon, Mart. Viny's a better hand with fried chicken than your Sally and my mint-bed's just as flourishing as yours. Mrs. Tithelow'll be pleased to have you. And so'll I. So-long."

He rode off, slumped and slouching, but he left Mart's gloom a little lightened. "He's heard—about Louellen and me, like every one else," thought Mart, watching him go. "And when he saw Amos West in that lot he come along to let me know he was my friend. And no hinting round to get me to tell him anything, either. I call that right kind. Doc's a good fellow."

CHAPTER NINE

THE chairs in the Wests' dining room were hand-made, all wood, painted dull black and striped with gray and gold, and on back-splat and top cross piece stenciled with clusters of fruit, magenta, dark mauve and green. The table was plain brown walnut with turned legs heavily reeded, ungraceful but substantial. There was a zinc square under a stove with a shining black body and a shining brass urn on top and a painted woodbox, brown.

A side table with drop leaves was placed below the South window and held a mélange of homely objects, a sewing basket, string, the weekly paper, Sunday school leaflets, a bottle of ink and two pens. At the end of this table stood a dressmaker's cutting board, a yard stick, and a convenient nail held a flat green calico bag of paper patterns, tied with identifying scraps of the materials they had helped to shape. There were no curtains, only window shades of dull tan printed with a design of brown and gold. There was a low cupboard with solid doors, and the only decorations on the whitewashed walls were a mirror with a basketry holder for a comb and brush underneath it, and an old steel engraving of "The Battle of Waterloo." A hanging lamp with its white glass shade had place over the dining table.

For this room was not only the dining room, but the familiar sitting and work room of the family. The real sitting room, with its cane-seated straight chairs, its two patent rockers and the other rocker of bent wood, its round center table and book-case-desk, its organ and sofa, was not a place for family gathering,—it was for company of the more informal sort. Across the hall the best parlor, with a plush "suite" and an easeled picture, awaited the ele-

gancies of set entertainments and guests to whom notable honors were due.

But in the dining room the family life went on. In spite of its plainness the room was neither poor nor mean, for it had order, cleanliness, and a comfortable lived-in quality, usual in homes where life has certain fixed duties, and values, and where there is simplicity without poverty.

The dining room table had been stripped bare and Jane West, shears in hand, bent over a troubled sea of white cotton stuff and patterns. Outside, on the porch, Louellen West sat and sewed her wedding clothes, with Annie helping. Mrs. West cut out and handed the segmented pieces to the girls. A bolt of cambric and a bolt of muslin were the first requisites of every trousseau. Muslin might be sewed on the machine, but the cambric must be stitched and whipped and eyeleted and buttonholed by hand. No girl of self-respect, or any sensitiveness to comment, could be married in anything but underwear she had herself made. Miss Stella Smith, who "sewed round," or Mrs. Sidney Cline, the leading dressmaker of the county seat, would undoubtedly be called on to make the wedding dress, and the heavy black silk which was the sign and symbol of respectable matronhood, and possibly another gown or two, but it was inevitable that everything more intimate was made by the betrothed girl. Young feminine friends, and maiden aunts sent yards of crocheted and knitted lace for adornment, and sometimes stitched an oddment or two—a fine white apron, or a fancy corset cover—darted and fitted like a basque—but that was all the help she had.

"But it's changed sence I was a girl," commented Mrs. West, cheerily. "Then you had to weave your tablecloths and towels, every one of 'em, and some girls even spun the flax for 'em. And you had to weave at least one pair blankets, and a coverlet or two, and make your quilts,—it took an awful long time to get a setting-out that was worth having, I can tell you, going at it nip and tuck, too. Cousin Eveline Moore was five years getting ready. Alec

Moore told her at last that if she didn't stop sewing and weaving and buy her wedding dress, he was going to get another girl who wasn't so pa'tic'ler. He said he wanted a wife, not a store of bedclothes and linens. He was a sight!"

The two girls had heard the story of Cousin Eveline Moore and the impatient Alec many times. They disregarded it. Annie took up an interrupted plaint.

"If you were only going to be married in white. It's ridiculous to wear a dark wool dress."

Louellen spoke without heat and without haste, as of something that did not matter: "That ashes-of-rose barège will give me good wear and it'll be real pretty."

Annie pursed her lips. "You might at least have had a silk."

"I'll have my black silk."

"Y-e-s—but it's not the same. Listen, Louellen, why don't you have it made with one of the paneled fronts filled in with cross rows of lace ruffles? That would be sweet. You know—like the picture in the *Monthly*."

"It's too fancy."

"My good land—you're not a million, are you? You're getting *married!* If that's not the time to be fancy, when is?"

Louellen did not answer. Her mother, who had left off cutting out and settled herself in a slat rocker between her daughters, looked up from the tucks she was basting, rather humorously: "I never expected to see you so sensible," she remarked.

Louellen did not raise her eyes from her work. She was making an embroidered band for a chemise top, an elaborate pattern of daisied eyelets and fine scallops, and she stabbed the material with her stiletto, twisted it carefully and drew it out before she spoke. She recalled that John Henry had called her sensible that last night of camp-meeting, and the memory stirred her to faint irony.

"The prospect of matrimony's quieted me down, you see, Ma."

Annie had been looking through the open doors of the hall, for though it was now late September the day was as mellow as midsummer.

"Somebody's coming," she announced. "I do believe—yes—it's a pack peddler. Oh, what fun! I do hope he's got something besides tin."

The man came on, watching anxiously for a possible hostile dog. Skilled in the ways of farm women, he did not go to the front door but came directly around to the side, bending under his oilcloth-covered rattling pack. He was a Jew, thin, dark, his black beard touched with gray, his eyes ingratiating.

"Good afternoon, ladies," he said, and his voice was soft, humble. "I show you my goots—nice tin—very, very nice new bright tin."

He did not wait for their permission, but slid his burden to the porch floor, unbuckled it deftly. It was true—here was much tin, winking, bright, new. The three women gazed critically, Annie getting up from her chair to be nearer.

"I need a dipper," said Mrs. West. "There—that long handled one—"

"Let's get another strainer," suggested Annie. "The old one won't hold out much longer. There's a good one."

"A nice liddle pan?" asked the peddler, putting aside the two pieces chosen, and hunting among his stock for something to tempt them further.

"M-m-m-m,—I do like a little pan that size. If we'd get two they'd be just right for Sally Lunn," urged Annie.

"I believe I'll get two-three things for you, too, Louellen," said Mrs. West, warming with the buying impulse. "I s'pose Aunt Lena'll leave everything to do with over at John Henry's, but I expect you'd kind of enjoy some little special things of your own, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I don't care," said Louellen, stabbing another eyelet.

Her mother gave her a speculative gaze and so did the peddler. He was quick to seize the hint.

"Theze yong lady, she go for to marry?" he asked. "I know—look—" He brought out a muffin pan, another dipper, a cake pan with a fluted rim. "To cook for hosband," he said, rubbing his hands. Then he looked up again at the indifferent Louellen—and back to Annie. He waved interrogative fingers at the younger girl. "Is it theze yong lady who get married?" he asked, puzzled.

"No,—that's the one," said Mrs. West, indicating Louellen.

The Jew stared at her so sharply that at last she raised her eyes to meet his gaze. "But no—she should not marry," he said at last, hurriedly. "Something is not right, she has no happiness."

The introduction of a question of abstract emotion among simple barter and sale had its effect on all concerned. Mrs. West remained poised and keenly thoughtful, the cake tin in her hand. Annie giggled. But Louellen met the Jew's eyes mockingly.

"What makes you say that?" she asked. "The man I'm going to marry has a great big farm and a lot of cattle, and he's a good man, belongs to the church, hasn't got any bad habits."

"He is old, then," answered the Jew with cynic decision.

"No, he isn't. He's young."

"Then why are you not happy?"

"Oh, but I am. Very happy."

He had, at one side of his pack, a wrapped and strapped parcel, and this he now began to open. Oilcloth, then rough paper, then fine paper, then a twist of softest thin linen, and at last he brought out the treasure, a shawl of white crêpe, soft and heavy, covered with embroidery, all white, butterflies, birds with long tails, flowers a hand's span across, garlands of vine with reaching, twisting tendrils, buds in curved slender calyxes, and all around a dripping thick fringe, knotted and tied with patient intricacy, inches deep. The Jew lifted it gently, spread it for them to see, carefully, lovingly.

"My soul!" exclaimed Mrs. West. "I never saw anything so sweet-pretty in my life. Takes your breath away." She and Annie dropped on their knees beside the lovely web, touched it with the lightest, inquiring, fondling fingers, marveling. Louellen sat still, but she looked at it wistfully.

"She is from Spain," said the Jew, "and before that from China. I—I am from Spain. She has come into my hands and I wait for a bride to sell her, a yong bride. And fair."

"How much do you want for it?" asked Mrs. West. "It just bewitches me."

"Me, too," said Annie. "Look at that rosebud!"

"I ask but feefty dollar. She is wort much more. But she come to me for liddle, and I let her go for liddle."

He was watching Louellen, but she had picked up her stiletto again and did not move toward the alluring square.

Mrs. West slipped her hands under the shawl and stretched it upon them. "It's a splendid size," she said practically. "Upon my word, I've a great mind to get it for you, Louellen. You could wear it the Sunday you come out a bride. It'd make everybody in church set up and stare."

Then Louellen spoke, with soft decision: "I don't want it, Ma. Get it and save it for Annie if you want to, but not me."

"You're crazy, sis," cried Annie. "That beauty thing—not want it!"

The Jew took the shawl from Mrs. West and folded it rapidly, replacing it in its wrappings. "That prove you are not happy," he said. "No happy woman but would want that shawl to make glad the eyes of her lover. You could have it—you do not want it—you are not happy." He finished tying it in place. "Better have pan for cake, pan for bread, liddle muffin pan," he went on. "Happy or not, everybody eat."

"Yes," said Louellen, dryly responsive, "everybody eats, whether they're happy or not. I'd like the cake pan, Ma, and the other things. And that clever little trick to turn over griddle cakes. And that colander. There—how much

is that?" She had dropped her work now and come to rummage in the pack with the others.

"Go in the sitting room closet and fetch me my purse, Annie," said Jane West. "How much is it all?"

The purse was brought, the Jew's price named and the sum paid. He wrapped up his pack silently, but when it was taut and firm and he was ready to slip the straps over his shoulders, and bend his back to its weight, he spoke once more to Louellen.

"Better not do it," he said, as if she would understand what he meant. "You think you are strong enough, but you are not. I will soon be an old man. I have seen things. I know. Better a little tears now, and high words flying, than the long, long days of sorrow after. You are not strong enough. I am only a poor Jew. But I have seen. I know."

He hitched the pack to his back, caught up his stick and went away. "Wasn't he funny!" cried Annie, "talking like he'd known us for years. A Jew pack-peddler—I almost tickled right out, he was so solemn. Ma, I wish you'd bought that shawl for me since Louellen was such a gump not to take it."

"Annie," said Jane West, mildly, "you really ought to go out a while this afternoon and begin to pick the dried lima beans. First thing we know a spell of wet weather'll come along and they'll mold. I could send Rachel to help you soon's she's through her mopping. Louellen can't leave her sewing—and I'd like to finish cutting out on that cambric s'afternoon."

"Oh, all right," said Annie. "Call me if anybody else comes, won't you?" She slipped away to get her sunbonnet, her knitted mitts, and basket. Presently they heard the sound of her high sweet singing as she went gardenward.

"I sent Annie off, so's I could talk to you, Louellen. You worried me the way you answered that man," began Jane West. "Fact is, I've never been right down satisfied in my mind about you and John Henry. What with Mart Bladen

coming to see you, so strange, right after you made up your mind *about* John Henry, and the way you've acted ever since."

Louellen drew a long sigh. There had always been a good understanding between herself and her mother, and the present queries were offered in no inquisitorial maternal tone, but as one friend, concerned and affectionate, to another. Yet,—how could she tell Jane West adequately of the canker of her spirit, her trapped submission, and her hopeless endurance? How could she confess that she had cheapened herself forever in her own eyes by offering Mart Bladen a bargain he had not cared to keep, the stubborn fact that all his protestations could not wipe away? No, these things it was her right to conceal, even from kindness. But she must make some response.

"I don't know what I can tell you, Ma," she began, choosing her words. "I said I'd marry John Henry and there's an end to it. What would happen if I tried to go back on it now! Pa'd drive me out of the house."

"Do you want to go back on it?" asked her mother searchingly, "or are you just notional? You've got sense enough to know the difference. A good many girls aren't so crazy about getting married. I wasn't myself."

Louellen tried hard to visualize her mother young and in the same case as herself, but it was difficult. This stout brisk kindly woman—had she ever lain awake at night and hoped to die before morning? Had those hands, so skilled in sewing, so deft with butter prints and cheese molds, ever clenched on each other in an agony of rebellion and bitterness against life? Had her shrewd placid eyes ever wept scorching tears? It all seemed unlikely, yet the statement that she had not cared much for marriage brought the daughter nearer to her.

"Oh, I'm not sure which it is. I know I don't feel to John Henry like he feels to me. And it—it—he—" How should she tell of John Henry's strange greedy grasp of her, that revolted her and darkened all the future?

"I wouldn't like to have you break off with John Henry, exactly," said Jane West dispassionately. "There'd be such a to-do and talk, and your father would act up so, for a while anyway. And a promise to marry is almost as binding as the wedding itself, and everybody feels that way about it. But, all the same, I don't want you to marry him unless you feel pretty sure it's going to be all right. Marrying isn't like anything else—for a woman, I mean. All the other folks you have around you, you can get away from, even your family. But a husband's a stubborn fact. Just having him in the same room with you sometimes is enough to set you crazy. There are times when every woman, I don't care who she is, hates the man she's tied to so hard that she would like to kill him. For he won't let you get away from him. If he's not satisfied, he gives you no peace. No matter if you think the world and all of him, it's just the same. And the first years are the worst, till you learn how to manage him, and make allowances, and have children."

"You're not giving me much encouragement, Ma."

"I do sound gloomy, that's a fact. Maybe I was putting it too strong. But no, Louellen, I'm not. And I can say the more, because John Henry's a good bit like your Pa when he was a young man. And you're a good bit like me when I was a girl."

"Mother," demanded Louellen, "if you had it to do over again, would you have married Pa?"

Mrs. West laughed, the comfortable laugh of a philosophic woman unafflicted with nerves. "If you'd asked me that last week when he took the notion that I ought to mend all those old sacks against next year's harvest, whether or no, and they stinking dirty, and the weather so hot, and right when I was putting up pickle, I expect I'd've said no, no, never. Just the unreasonableness and the dumbness of a man about little things'll sometimes fret you past bearing. But take it year in and year out, your Pa and I have got along pretty well. He's a good provider, and he

won't so much as look at another woman, even if she was as handsome as a picture, and that's a mighty comfort, no matter who says 'tisn't. He's never been mean about the egg and butter money, like some men, neither."

"Oh!" cried Louellen, "is this all there is to marrying—all? Having children, eggs and butter money, mending grain sacks, a man around under foot all the time, a good provider? It's just like the Jew peddler said—happy or not, everybody eats. Isn't there any—companionship—and understanding—and—and happiness—that's different from everything else?"

"I'm afraid you've got romantic notions," said her mother swiftly, "or you're thinking about Mart Bladen. What is it between you and Mart, anyway?"

"What is there against Mart, I'd like to know?" parried Louellen. "The Bladens were nice people—you used to be friends with his mother, didn't you? The two girls were nice. Why should Pa be so awful down on Mart?"

"Permelia Bladen was as good a woman as ever stepped," conceded Mrs. West. "And Mart's father was right likely, too, though I never was well acquainted with him. But Mart's always been wild."

"That doesn't make him wicked. You said so yourself to Mrs. Truitt out at camp. You said, wildness and wickedness are different and many a wild young man'll settle down in time and be a good citizen. You know you did."

"So they do, so they do. And then again, they don't. There's the Kemps, and Mart runs with 'em. All the same—"

"Ma," demanded Louellen, "are you arguing for Mart or against him?"

Mrs. West was forced to smile. "Be switched if I know. There's something mighty taking about that boy and always was. I mind him as a little shaver sitting in his mother's lap, curls all over his head, and laughing, as jolly and cunning as you please."

Something constricted Louellen's throat. Mart—laugh-

ing! She could see him so. "But," concluded Mrs. West, "I'd hate to see you married to a drinking man."

The words evoked another image of Mart—Mart drunk, dirty, rioting. That was how he had shown her that he did not care—enough. The door of communication between her own heart and her mother's snapped to.

"You're not going to see me marry a drinking man, unless John Henry takes to drink. I've passed my word to John Henry and I'm going to keep it. It's just as well."

Mrs. West's counsels were not all said. "Maybe it is. I, myself, I favor a marriage where the man's more in love with the woman than she is with him. It gives her a hold on him, and on herself. It gives her a place in her feelings where things can't drive in on her so hard. You don't understand me now, but you will after a while. You see, Louellen, when a woman cares such a lot for a man he can hurt her so, in her feelings. It's good when she doesn't have to care so much, and can keep out of the strain of it. Yet, to live with any man, unless you think a powerful lot of him, unless he matters more'n anything in the world, is past enduring. Oh—I want you to be contented. I'd like to see you a little more excited and foolish, like Annie. I wish—you'd have wanted that shawl." There was wistful love in her words, yearning in her eyes.

Caresses were rare in the West family. Amos West had always condemned any demonstration of affection—"the setting up of vain idols," "weakness and vanity of human ties," etc., etc. But now Louellen dropped her work, and bent over her mother, hugged her, put a burrowing chin into her broad shoulder, and for a moment luxuriated, as does a very little child, in the secure tenderness of her embrace.

"Oh, Ma—you're so good."

"Don't you be unhappy, Loüellen—about Mart Bladen. There's always some fellow like that to hang around a girl and get her all excited, but if you married him you'd maybe be like poor Tillie Kemp, and that's a black valley

to travel. Safe things is best. I'll admit that I'd've liked you to pick up with somebody who's got a little more give and take to him than John Henry, and wasn't so bent on religion—and I don't care if it's a sin to say so. Well, maybe I don't mean that—I reckon I mean I wish he didn't take his religion so hard and gloomy like your Pa does. The day of joyful saints seems to be clear past, round hereabouts, anyways. But maybe you can get him chirked up and out of it somewhat, for he certainly does dote on you." She patted Louellen on the back for reassurance.

Tremblingly, reluctantly, the girl answered: "It's—that, Ma. He—he thinks too much of me. He scares me—sometimes he turns me—kind of sick."

Her mother had an instant clear vision of the passionate darkness of John Henry, on fire with craving, sharp-set, unsatisfied. She knew. But she could not explain it to her daughter without heightening her apprehension, creating disgust. She stroked Louellen's hair, held her close.

"John Henry's a young man," she said, "and he's got a young man's feelings. When you're married, when he's sure of you, you see, all that will pass away. It's the uncertainty and the long delay that's pushed him so. You kept him hanging round for a long time, Louellen, and worried him considerable. Now—don't you think about it any more."

She resolved to drop a terse hint to John Henry. He should be more cautious. Louellen wasn't one of those girls who let every young spark riding by kiss and get familiar,—she wasn't even interested in hearing the other girls tell about that sort of thing. Jane West had kept a close eye on both her girls, but with a minimum of spoken precept. She kissed the smooth cheek nearest her. The scene had come to its climax, and she was satisfied that talking out the matter had cooled its heat.

"You pick up that tinware and put yours with the rest of your things," she directed in her everyday voice. "And take what I got for myself to the kitchen. Don't you think

you better go help Annie and Rachel a little? You've been sewing pretty steady and it gets tiresome."

She gazed after her, still not quite serene. She had an acute sense of balance and fairness, Jane West. John Henry—and Mart Bladen. She recalled Permelia Bladen's quick blue eyes, her pride in her last baby. She saw Mart, warm, sturdy, engaging. And she became conscious that she had betrayed her own little live streak of romance that had colored her secret imaginings, helped her into a humorous and contented middle age, and had caused, more than once, Amos West and his strait-laced intimates to cock a suspicious eye at her, albeit they could verify nothing of its existence.

"If I had to do it myself," she thought, "blessed if I wouldn't take Mart. But for your own daughter—no—I couldn't prescribe it. It's too big a risk."

CHAPTER TEN

PUBLIC opinion, for the greater part, supported Jane West. In this long-settled farming community, dating back to the late sixteen hundreds, an appreciation of all the solid virtues was universal. Yet there were two distinct elements, present from the first settlement, in which division was made roughly along religious lines. The Catholics and Episcopalians still clung to traditions of the old cavalier aristocracy of palatinate days, traditions that had their keynote in lavishness, lavish living, lavish spending, lavish hospitality, delegated authority and responsibility in cultivating their fertile holdings, and more or less of disinclination to hard manual labor. The Civil War put a definite end to this sort of existence, but the type persisted, having a real vitality. But from the very first of Maryland history there had been another element, Methodist, with a powerful flavoring of Puritan. These were mostly small farmers who would not hold slaves, deeming it a matter of conscience not to do so, so in order to till their fields were forced to hire at a wage the slaves of their less scrupulous neighbors of the big plantations. This element had also a stout vitality, and since the old days of slavery were over, and the fox-hunting, hard-riding, hard-drinking idle squire could now no longer finance himself save by selling off his land, it was the small farmers who bought him up, establishing themselves firmly in his place, but with a mighty difference. It was largely this hitherto disregarded element which, gathering its strength, carried the State Constitutional Convention of 1864, assembled at Annapolis, and adopted that "Bill of Rights" which abolished slavery in the state of Maryland forever. Yet, among these, there were many who voted the Democratic ticket, even in those troubled times when the way to the polling

place lay between files of soldiers with fixed bayonets. It is a matter of record that when feeling was at its height one sturdy yeoman went to the ballot box with his Democratic ticket in one hand and an unsheathed bowie knife in the other. There is no coercion for conviction such as this. It has an unbreakable fiber. Freedom for such people is not a word to be spoken, but a condition of living.

In the decade and a half that had passed since the Civil War, the aristocratic element had waned, the Puritan had been stabilized and strengthened. Basic conditions, however, did not change, the farmer and his industry continuing paramount, the towns existing mostly as points of focus for shipping of produce and the necessary distribution of supplies, and also for the administration of the local government, the availability of the law.

Nor must it be supposed that this religious and social cleavage was distinct or precise. The community was too small, too near a level in means and opportunity, too long-established in ties of acquaintance and kinship for that. The old slave holders took what means they had and withdrew to the towns and lived as well as they could,—many of them sought political jobs, register of wills, county clerk, Justice of the Peace. To win such preferment necessitated amiable contacts with all voters. General conditions tended toward a democracy of feeling and understanding.

The very isolation of the community, geographically, the few railroad lines, the slowness of boat transportation, and their own inclination as well, kept them in partial isolation from the swift impetus and fret of progress, turned them to one another for interest and society. Old traditions flourished, and old customs were not discarded. Everybody knew everybody else, and gossip flourished pleasantly, with no undercurrent of malice or spite. Death, birth, marriage, church or private entertainment, travel, nothing was too large or too small to furnish a grist of news and comment. The solid virtues received their due share of acclamation, but even their keenest appreciators were not wholly naïve.

The approaching marriage of Louellen West and John Henry Hyde, with the attendant disappointment of Mart Bladen, furnished a fruitful theme. The fact that the two young bachelors should be neighbors, and both sue for the same girl, was in itself unusual and exciting. It was the consensus of opinion that Louellen had done well for herself, but there were rejoinders that an ultimate share of Amos West's worldly goods was not wholly outside of John Henry's careful reckoning. Miss Becca Simpson remarked caustically that for her part, if she was Louellen, she'd just as soon marry a death's head with a bone in its mouth. But while this won some appreciative titters, it was held to be merely one of Miss Becca's flourishes, and not to be taken seriously.

Sister Truitt, on the other hand, openly acclaimed the approaching nuptials as the establishment of another godly and righteous household, pleasing in the sight of the Lord.

Rena Massey, whose mind was set on the gauds of this world rather than on the treasures of the next, was openly regretful that Louellen did not see fit to provide herself with a more dressy outfit. There was further peevishness —concealed—in Rena's feeling, because most of the purchases for Louellen's trousseau were made in Baltimore and not from the Massey store.

Esther Dawson, belonging to a younger set that found all marriage exciting and stimulating, would have preferred to see it approached with a more festive spirit.

There were other girls who were openly congratulatory to Louellen for choosing John Henry, but secretly congratulated themselves that she had not taken Mart. He was now wholly free. Of all these Della Layton was the chief, though since the dreadful day when she had hastened to tell him of his rejection, she had not seen him. She clung desperately to the hope that after the wedding had taken place he would need consolation, be more accessible.

Amos West was sincerely and honestly pleased, though he felt that it was more than his just due. He could never

understand why the ungodly should be allowed to flourish. Prosperity, success, happiness, fulfillment of desires, he considered exclusively the right of the good man and woman, goodness to be interpreted in terms of austere living and strict religious observance, and an abundance of intolerance for any one who did not do likewise.

He had brought up his daughters in the way they should go, and that Louellen should have attracted that unregenerate profligate, Mart Bladen, was a distinct shortcoming and lack of recognition on the part of Providence. Now that she had seen the light and was prepared to join hands with and be submissive to a true son of the church, Amos West knew that the favor of the Lord was surely his. It made him unusually liberal in providing Louellen with her wedding outfit. He gave her not only money for clothes and linen and a handsome set of furniture, but added thereto some blooded cattle, a beautiful young driving horse, and a thousand dollar mortgage, the interest of which would be for her own spending. He also indicated that he desired the wedding dinner to be a feast of lavishness. He would send, he vowed, to Baltimore for a barrel of oysters, for celery, tropical fruits, raisins, nuts, confectionery. Jane West, canny, observing his state of malleability, suggested that they would need more china, more glass and silver. To which he replied tersely, "Get what you want," and had no suspicion that his wife had manipulated him to fulfill certain worldly ambitions toward gold-banded plates, a crystal centerpiece and a silver cake-basket.

Against all this conclusive weight of approbation there were a few of Mart Bladen's associates who swore that it was a double d'd shame and an outrage that any girl should fancy a hide-bound spoil-sport like John Henry Hyde, when she might have had a real man,—but even these were inclined, under their breath, to felicitate Mart on having escaped the weariness of being son-in-law to Amos West. There were plenty of girls left to pick from—to their way of thinking a woman was only a woman, and there was

little to choose between one and another, provided they were young and pretty and not too prudish. These rustic men of the world did not comprehend monogamy, either from inclination or necessity, hence there seemed to them no reason why Mart should set his heart on any girl in particular.

But they did not press their views on him, nor rally him on his, save once. Jere Willis was the offender: "Hear your girl dished you for a deacon," he jeered, soon after the story got about. "That why you look so down in the mouth?"

He and those around him were unprepared for what followed. Mart had blazed: "You keep off me and my looks, or I'll shut your mouth for you."

They had both been drinking, enough to make Jere, usually good-natured, inclined to swagger. "I'll say what I please when I please," he returned truculently.

Mart leaped at him on the instant and there was a very beautiful fight which delighted those who were fortunate enough to be present. They made a ring and encouraged the combatants impartially. "Sock it to 'im, Jere," "Slug 'im, Mart."

Jere was a larger man than Mart, had a longer reach, possessed more brute strength, but he might as well have fought a whirlwind, populated with wild cats. Mart had such pent-up emotion to relieve through his muscles, and he was so merciless and beat Jere so cruelly, even after he had yelled " 'nough," that the others interfered and dragged him off. He was still crazy with senseless fury. They had to hold him, overpower him. In the end he managed to wrench free, and leaping on Star, rode away from them, break-neck. Jere picked himself up, felt of his swollen eye, spat blood from a misshapen, swelling mouth.

"What's the *matter* with him?" he demanded, bewildered. "Can't he take a joke? I didn't know he was going to get *mad*."

The spectators were as amazed as the victim. "And he

looked so funny," commented Joe Kemp. "Like he was going to cry."

"Didn't feel like he was crying none when he hit me," said Jere ruefully. "Loosened my two front teeth. And lookit my shirt. Bloody son of a bitch—whadit he mean, flying at me, like that?"

"You oughtn' to've rigged him about losing his girl," contributed Gid Cummins. "He's like a bear with a sore head about getting the go-by."

"But hell—what's a girl more or less?" demanded Jere. "Whyn't he go whale the lights outa John Henry Hyde 'nstead of *me? I* didn't get his girl."

Something of the same question was running through Mart's own disheveled head as he rode away. Why had he struck Jere? Jere was blameless. Even his joke was harmless enough, not as rough as much of the other "running" that the gang frequently indulged in with one another. Yet it had been acid to Mart's wound.

The fight had sobered him, of drink and of feeling. His mind turned inevitably to Louellen. Only two nights before, riding past her home, in futile hunger to see her, he had met her with John Henry in his buggy on their sedate way to Wednesday night prayer-meeting. Through the thin darkness he recognized them, reined his horse to let them pass.

The sight of her thus had been torment. He had felt murder clutch at his impulses. He wanted to leap at John Henry's throat as he had leaped at Jere, and clamp his fingers in his throat and so hold him, hold him struggling and gasping and choking, until he was as dead as a herring. He could have done it rejoicingly before Louellen's eyes.

And now, coming from this fight with Jere, he regretted that he had let John Henry and Louellen pass. Indubitably it was John Henry he should have battered and beaten. He pulled up Star and meditated. There was no reason why it should not yet be done, satisfyingly. Perhaps, if he did it, it would clear a way out of this miasma of pain and

resentment and indirection through which he had, it seemed, been stumbling for uncounted time, ever since Louellen had told him. . . . Maybe some sort of violent action would straighten things. . . . And he must do something, or the pressure of the empty days would break him.

He turned Star to the road that would take him to the Wests'. John Henry would be there, every night, he was sure. And he was glad that he would be—he'd rather thrash John Henry in front of Louellen than behind her back. Then she'd see who was the better man.

So he reasoned with himself, disregarding the most obvious facts and conclusions, as all of us do when we are in the power of something stronger than ourselves. He who called love a state of insanity was hideously right. Successful or unsuccessful, it fosters delusions which later we can only marvel at.

So Mart. As he rode he wondered why he had not done this before. And why he had not been more persistent, dogged Louellen's presence, compelled her. It was that first visit that had held him back from going again. It had all been too—queer. But he now explained it all to himself, with confidence. She was angry, then, with his escapade at the camp-meeting so fresh in her mind. Now she would partially have forgotten that. Yet he could not be entirely sure.

For in her denial of herself to him, he had had a rudimentary sense of the injustice of it. She had reminded him that she had given her word and she had kept it. That he had given his word and he had broken it. Even-handed is fate, even-handed and cruel, without leniency, without kindness. Only . . . why should Louellen set herself up as Fate? The bitterest taste was that she had not loved him enough to forgive. He had a dim consciousness that love without forgiveness, without adjustment to the individual need, without tolerance, lacked its big essential. Louellen had failed him. The pale, tight-lipped girl who had faced him in the hallway and so rigidly adhered to her

thin notions of right and wrong was not the Louellen he knew and loved, the Louellen who had warmth and life and feeling. Strict justice she had dealt to him, and justice, he felt, had nothing vital to do with youth and love.

But by now, he argued eagerly to convince himself, Louellen would have had time to let her anger cool, and repent that she had engaged herself to John Henry. The Louellen whom he loved was more real than that other, that strange Louellen who had told him she was going to marry John Henry Hyde. He forgot that other Louellen, pushed her into oblivion. He lifted his face and swore to the unheeding calm of the twilight sky that Louellen was not going to marry John Henry Hyde. She could not. . . .

The material and conventional obstacles did not worry him, or loom large in his mind, though he was aware that local custom regarded an acknowledged betrothal as only one degree less binding than marriage itself, and a broken engagement, unless for serious cause, was a scandal, frowned on by every class, discountenanced, disfavored. Mart did not think of this. What to him was public opinion? He had never catered to it, never trimmed or changed for it. What would it be to Louellen, once he held her safe, protected by his love? He would make up to her for all criticism, all reproach. He would do everything she wished.

He remembered the swift curve of her lips, the changing lights of blue that turned her eyes first teasingly, then deeply tender. He put out his hand as if to touch her warm hands, so small in his own. He saw the slimness of her, with the strength beneath it that made her all smooth and pliant curves. He conjured her before him to convince him that she was really his, and that the immediate past was no more than an ugly dream. He groped for words to phrase her in. . . . "Little dear sweetness" . . . "My girl!" . . . (He was not gifted in the speech of sentiment, but these sufficed.) At last he rode up to her door in confidence. By God, she *must* own the truth this time. When he was through with John Henry . . . he was ready for anything.

As he had hoped, John Henry's team was there, at one of the row of hitching posts. The sight pleased Mart. It seemed an auspicious beginning.

He banged at the front door, and it was opened by Amos West, instantly bristling.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"To see Louellen."

"You can't see her. You can't come into my house. You get off my premises and stay off."

"Don't get too brash," said Mart. "I've licked a man a lot bigger than you to-day. I came to see Louellen and Louellen I'm going to see, come hell or high water. Understand that? Is she home?"

"Get out of here," said Amos West again. "I'd as lief shoot you as any dog that came after my sheep."

"You got a high temper for a church member," said Mart, beginning to enjoy the wordy fray. "It's poor sense for me to quarrel with you again,—but don't you start any shooting, or I might do something worse'n sling hard words. You think you're not going to let me see Louellen, h'mh?" He raised his voice. "Oh-h, Louellen—come out here, will you?"

The door into the hallway opened, but Amos West addressed savage admonition over his shoulder: "You go back. Wait—tell John Henry to come out here—"

"That suits me precisely," said Mart. "I was aiming to see John Henry, too."

But ahead of John Henry came Louellen, and the instant that Mart saw her he knew that all his dreams were in vain. She was farther from him than before. She seemed older, tired, remote and alone, and something of his youth left Mart Bladen's heart as he realized her.

"Oh, Mart," she said, as if his being there was no surprise, but another weariness and pain, "why will you do things like this?"

With that John Henry appeared at her shoulder. "You

go back," he said, his hand proprietor-fashion on her arm, "I'll deal with him."

"Let me alone," said Louellen sharply. Somehow she seemed to assert herself, efface the two hostile men behind her. She stood before them, a hand on each doorpost, her arms spread wide and stiffly, like a crucifix, silhouetted and leaning toward the man outside. "Mart," she went on, "what's the use of you acting like this? I told you before—I *told* you—"

"Louellen," he said, "I can't—I won't believe it. I had to see you again—" His voice failed. He forgot that he had come to lick John Henry as he had licked Jere. He forgot everything but that she was there, and near him, and he could speak to her.

"It wasn't right, the things I said the other time," he said, groping. "I didn't mean it—when I left, you know. I don't hold anything up against you, Louellen. But—what do you do this for?"

She stood rigid. "Go on away, Mart. It's too late now. Go on away and—and get—some other girl, and be—happy."

"Don't talk foolishness," he cried. "Think I'd ever look at any girl but you?"

They became aware of indignation rolling over her shoulders.

"Are you crazy, Louellen, to stand there, answering that worthless rip—" It appeared that Amos West was seething with rage. "Go in to your mother—John Henry and I'll attend to him." John Henry, too, was making hostile demonstrations.

"You only make things hard for me, Mart," she said. "Go away—and don't come back." Suddenly she shut the door in his face and stood with her back against it, holding to the knob. She faced her father and the man she was going to marry, and held her ground.

"If either of you go out there and—and touch him," she

said, "I'll go out, too,—and I'll go away with him,—if he wants me to. No, I'll go whether he wants me to or not."

The revolt was so stupendous that Amos West was left fairly without words. The moment that they stood there was the longest and the hardest of all his fifty-six years. He snorted and choked, but he did not try to move her hand from the door knob. At the end of the moment, she walked past them into the sitting room. "I think—" said Amos West, "I think—you better speak to her. I never knew her to talk like this—" He left John Henry and Louellen together.

"You act very strange, considering how near our wedding day is," began John Henry, rebukingly. "I don't want any more of this kind of goings on, Louellen, that's flat."

"Do you want to back out?" demanded Louellen, seizing instantly this slight chance to escape. "Do you want to break it off? Because if you do, I'm ready."

Her hardness, her determination brought him to instant submission. "How can you think that?" he reproached her. "It'd kill me—so near—and after I've waited so."

"Well, then I reckon we won't talk about—this evening—any more, ever," she said.

Outside, in the dusk, Mart had waited. He did not hear what Louellen said after she closed the door. If he had, he would never have gone. He stood still, waiting, for a little, until he was sure that neither Amos West nor John Henry would come out. His braggart imagination, it appeared, had played him utterly false. Now, for the first time, he accepted it that Louellen would never be his own. In her voice, in her rigidness, she had managed to convey to him finality, and as a fate, a nemesis, a destiny, rather than anything that they might will to change. And with this finality came something more, a picture, etched clear, of the futility, the absurdity of his coming, his broken pleading to the girl, while Amos West and John Henry fumed and snarled behind her skirts.

He mounted Star and rode away, and as he went he could not keep from laughing. At himself. What a fool, what a saphead he had been. Why, he hadn't laid a finger on John Henry! And what he'd said to Amos West was nothing. It had all been nothing. It is easy to laugh—at nothing, even though there is no mirth nor heart in the laughter.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE house was warm with generous fires, clean to the finest point of cleanness. Everything that could be scrubbed had been scrubbed, everything that could be polished had been polished. The window panes flashed like jewels. No scrap of raveling or stray bit of fluff marred the remotest corner of any carpet. Jane West had said firmly when she attacked the task: "This is going to be a real housecleaning, and not a lick and a promise." The result justified her phrase. It had taken Rachel, and two other stalwart colored women, Jane West herself, Louellen and Annie the whole of ten days to accomplish it. But now it was done.

Another ten days were allotted to the preparation for the wedding dinner. Fruit cakes had been made six weeks before, to mellow and ripen in a big stone crock, a rosy apple or two keeping them company and aiding in the process. From time to time a small glass of brandy was poured on their rich darkness. Amos West had no inhibitions against the use of liquor in cooking. The fruit cake, though important, was but the beginning of the mighty labors of the kitchen. There must be pound cakes, with white almond icing half an inch thick, a crisp shell of flavorous sweetness. There must be no less than four great Charlotte Polonaises, most tedious and delicate to bring to perfection. There must be jellies, syllabubs, frozen custard. And these were mere kickshaws and comfits. The real stability of the dinner would be its oyster soup, its hickory smoked hams that had been scrubbed and boiled and skinned and finally baked with a constant basting of sweet wine, until their clove-patterned, knife-scored surfaces were all one spicy delight. There must be young turkeys stuffed with chestnuts, garlanded with rings of tiny sausages; there must be chicken

pies with crust as light as a feather; there must be molded cranberries, sweet pickled peaches, mustard pickle all yellow with turmeric; sweet potatoes glazed with maple sugar and laced with cider; white potatoes beaten to a fluff with cream and butter; squash and creamed onions; there must be pies, mince, pumpkin, custard, apple. And dozens of beaten biscuit, loaves of white bread. The store-room opening off Jane West's kitchen would have set Lucullus prancing. But, oh, the work it entailed!

Not that that made any difference. A wedding dinner was a wedding dinner in those days, and not a mere plateful of salad and sandwiches with a cup of fruit punch and a lady finger or two passed by a man hired from a caterer. Jane West meant to have every bit of her new china and glass in use. She was a cook of parts, and so was Rachel. They were both on their mettle. Moreover had not Amos West said to spare nothing? They took him at his word.

The task of preparation was a frenzied delight to Annie. To Louellen it was an anodyne. Her clothes were ready, packed in her little trunk. Her set of furniture, her portion of quilts and linen, had all been sent to her new home. Aunt Lena Hyde had received them with mixed emotions. "I expect I'll be quite as comfortable at my sister's, back in York State, as here," she told Amos West who had hauled Louellen's portion over. "John Henry's none too easy to do for. Of course my sister's got children, but then—" She paused. Into her strict and maidenly mind there had popped the thought that in the course of nature there might be children in John Henry's house also, but she could not voice anything so vulgar to a man. She changed her sentence, snifflingly, "but then, I can put up with anything, just so's I have a home, and I believe in young folks starting off to themselves." A womanly sensible creature Amos West thought her.

They were to be married at half past eleven, the dinner would be at twelve and that over, the happy pair were to

drive to Dover Bridge and, in the late afternoon, take from there the river boat to Baltimore, arriving in that city the next morning. John Henry had suggested that they go all the way to York State to see his people, but he did not urge it. Louellen, with Aunt Lena in mind as a specimen, had not been enthusiastic. Her apathy was scored by Annie. "I sh'd think you'd just jump at the chance to travel around, sis," said that active young damsel, with reproach. But Louellen had answered nothing.

As the time drew nearer her dread, her foreboding increased. What good could come of it all? John Henry's agitation, his brooding silences, his violent caresses, as violently checked, his flashes of temper followed by an almost cringing fear of resentment, chilled and revolted her. The man was eaten up with passion, and the nearness of its indulgence was the only thing he could think about. The vision of his coming wedding night obsessed him, and Louellen hated the way he looked at her when they were alone. She felt herself, dimly, his victim. She had no knowledge or experience whereby to understand, and because she did not love him she knew no slightest response to his ardors. The spurt of pity that had come to her when she promised to marry him revived now and then, faintly, but always more faintly. He was too clutching, too insistent.

Yet not all her thoughts were morbid and uncertain. Contact with her mother prevented that. Jane West was robust and normal, and constantly concerned with the exactness of small details and arrangements. Louellen could not shudder away from the insistence of John Henry when her mother wanted her to beat egg whites so they would not fall from the platter held upside down, when fresh cords must be put into pictures, when every dish and cup in the house must be dipped in hot suds, and rinsed and wiped shining dry. These and a hundred other duties must be done and done well, and they were accompanied by the constant flow of Jane West's talk, homely, petty house-talk,

cooking talk, talk as to whether certain relatives might be omitted from the wedding scene without starting a family feud, reminiscences about her own wedding preparations, all tinged through with an ironic, but not unkindly humor. Tragedy, even imminent tragedy, cannot stalk through a recipe for making soft-soap, or the anecdote of the young itinerant preacher who wore ladies' stockings.

Tragedy also was obliged to hold off while the wedding gifts arrived. These were largely utilitarian, for the day of the wedding gift which is frankly that and nothing more,—it could hardly be less,—had not yet arrived. Louellen received a featherbed and two feather pillows, four quilts, three tablecloths, a cut jet necklace from a well-to-do city cousin, a set of glass tumblers and pitcher, two glass dessert dishes, high-stemmed and covered, a half dozen solid silver spoons, a silver butter knife and sugar shell in a box, a carving set with horn handles, a dozen knives and forks of polished black wood and steel, several pairs of towels, two preserve dishes in knobbed blue glass, and two in knobbed green glass, a vase in purple-veined imitation marble, various "splashers" embroidered in red outline stitch by girl friends, with pondlilies and "cat-tails" and frogs and such-like aquatic subjects suitable to their future place above the wash-stand,—and that was all. One of her aunts sent a half gallon jar of brandied fruit mélange made by her own secret recipe and esteemed the greatest possible delicacy. According to popular standards, Louellen's kin and friends had done well by her.

As to the guests, there Mrs. West's prejudices halted before the bar of time-honored precedent. To a wedding all of one's blood-kin must be asked whether they were desired for themselves or not. So for two days before the event they came from everywhere, and lent willing hands to the last preparations. The stables were filled with strange horses, the stable yard with buggies and surreys. Within the house every bedroom was filled to overflowing. Even the bride's room—which, to be sure, she had always shared

with Annie—now was crowded by a trundle bed for three little cousins.

There were Uncle Ben West and Uncle Tracy West, the first a farmer, the second a cattle-buyer, and both far more inclined to secular joviality than their elder brother. With them came their wives, Aunt Marcia and Sarah, efficient, capable women both, whose first act after arriving was to get into old frocks and big gingham aprons and join the kitchen forces. These two families brought their children, gawky girls and boys, seven in the lot. Great-Aunt Virgie West came also, severe and disapproving, but intent to miss nothing. She observed only to condemn, denounce and deplore, her aged nose was curled in a perpetual sniff of scorn.

On Jane West's side there were three sisters, one unmarried and subdued into deprecative spinsterhood, the two others bustling matrons. One of these, Aunt Ella Devens, was inclined to dressiness—and the authority that goes with it—she even had frisettes;—and she had a watered black silk for best that was reputed to have cost fifteen dollars a yard. She had imparted her air of fashion and elegance to her daughter Clara, a languid young lady, who found no one to her liking until Rena Massey appeared, and these two, recognizing kindred spirits, thereafter were much together in confidences concerning flounces. A half dozen or so small fry swelled the total house guests to some twenty-five.

So filled was the house, so many the duties laid upon her by the presence of such an assembly, that for the last few days Louellen did not see John Henry alone. She was quite consciously glad of it. Her spirits rose a little under the cheer of his absence and the steady round of chaffing attention that she received.

They told her constantly that Louellen was a nice girl, a pretty girl, a smart girl, that she'd captured a fine young man, that she'd be so close home it would hardly seem like being married—"you can drive over and get a good meal

any time your cooking turns out bad" and "your Mother'll be right nearby to run to for advice"—they commended her housewifeliness, they praised her trousseau, they admired, they pretended to envy. There was no dissenting voice, for Louellen was a general favorite.

They reminded Jane West that

"Your son's your son till he gets him a wife,
But your daughter's your daughter all your life."

Over and through it all loomed Amos West, his severe minor prophet's face quite benevolent with satisfaction. His sisters-in-law tittered among themselves that it might almost be Amos who was getting married, he was so pleased with himself.

For all the complacent and kindly things they said to Louellen, those who had not seen and known him before shook their heads in secret after their first glimpse of John Henry. "Temper!" said one, meaningly. "Close-fisted," and "More religion," sighed another. "I sh'd think she'd got enough at home. Wasn't there something about a real wild young fellow courting her?" but the question was stifled in "sh-h" as Louellen herself passed by. "Don't he ever smile?" asked Clara, sotto voce of Rena Massey. The men folk were less critical, though Uncle Ben West confided to his wife that the bridegroom seemed "kind of a glum fellow." But as all were assured of the extent and solidity of John Henry's "prop'ty" it seemed, despite the few minor strictures passed, a likely match. They all forwarded the wedding preparations with great interest and heartiness, and since none of John Henry's people had made the long journey from York State to see him married, the day became peculiarly Louellen's festival.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THEY would not let her touch a finger to the housework that morning, but sent her to her room "to prink and prettify." There was an early and hurried breakfast, and then the forces divided. The older children were told off to dress themselves, and the younger ones, in their best, and then to go outdoors and play, sedately, with due regard for their clothes until they should be called in.

"Thank goodness it's a fine day—I never see better weather for early November," said one aunt.

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on," remarked another, the spinster.

"Looks like a weather-breeder to me," opined that bird of ill-omen, Great-Aunt Virgie West. But she was set at naught.

With the children out, the house was put in supreme order and the dinner preparations begun. When it was at the stage when it could be left to the colored women, with Rachel to direct, husbands were haled in and buttoned into their Sunday shirts, and sent out to the wood shed to shine their boots. An unflurried group of dignified aunts in rustling black silks, with looped gold watch chains, cameos, fringed bracelets and smart ruches descended a full hour before the time for the ceremony, ready to welcome Bro' Truitt and his wife, Miss Becca Simpson, and such of the kin on both sides as were not staying in the house, but who drove in from nearby.

"Here comes the bridegroom—looks kind of edgy, seems to me," was the comment when John Henry appeared. Aunt Lena, rather watery as to eyes and pink at the tip of the nose, but very grand in her dark purple Bonnet *faille* and beaver tippet, joined the swelling ranks below stairs.

Above, Louellen, with Annie and Rena for aids, and her

mother as director, had got into her wedding dress, the ashes-of-rose barège that Annie had so scorned. She was pale.

"Pinch up your cheeks a little," suggested Annie. "You look like a ghost."

Obediently, silently, Louellen pinched her cheeks. She was very silent. She stared at the white-faced stupid girl in the mirror and found it almost too strange to believe that it was she, that she was going to be married, that below the guests were waiting to see her made the wife of John Henry Hyde.

"If you feel faint I got some smelling salts," offered Rena. Rena was very vivid in garnet surah, the overskirt trimmed with so many double pleatings that she seemed to stand in the foam of an agitated silken tidal wave. Annie's dress was blue delaine, and she had a frill of fine white lace around her throat. She was flushed and pretty and important.

"Oh, sis, do you feel faint?" she asked anguishedly. It seemed incredible to Annie that Louellen was not laughing and excited. She acted as if getting married was of no more importance than going to town for an afternoon!

Mrs. West came forward. "I got something for you," she said. "Bend down your head, child."

Louellen bent down her head, and her mother slipped over it a long heavy gold chain with a pearl and turquoise studded slide. At the end was a gold watch, with encrustations of flowers and leaves in variously tinted gold. "That's my present," said Jane West proudly. "You can slip the watch right into the front of your basque."

Rena and Annie exclaimed with rapture, but Louellen stood with the lovely and costly thing in her hand, looking at it, still silent.

"Now girls, you go on downstairs," said Mrs. West, cutting short their adjectives. "Tell Aunt Ella to have the minister stand up at the end of the room between the two front windows. When all's ready you come and tell me, Annie, and send John Henry up the back stairs. He and

Louellen can come right down behind me, and you and Hance be there at the foot of the stairs to go in and stand beside 'em. Be sure Great-Aunt Virgie's got a chair right up front—or she'll take a fit. Now—"

They left her alone with Louellen. Wistfully, broodingly, the mother swept the daughter into her embrace.

"My little Louellen," she said, "you do your duty and you'll be happy. Only—don't you go to speculating too much whether you're happy or not. My land—where's my handkerchief!" She fumbled for it, blind with tears. "You like your watch?" she asked, trying to calm herself.

And now Louellen came to life, furiously. She gripped her mother's arms, she turned toward her a distraught, distorted face. "I can't do it," she cried. "I can't! I won't marry him—I hate him! Mother—mother—don't make me —it'll kill me! It'll kill me!"

Jane West looked behind her and pushed the door to with her foot before she tried to answer. "Hush!" she said. "Louellen—don't you get hysterical—now. That's all it is—you're hysterical. You had too much to do these last weeks. My goodness—hush—don't cry—how'll you look—?" In spite of her concern for her child she cocked an agitated ear downstairs. Could they hear? She caught up Rena's salts and held them to Louellen's nose.

"I don't care—I don't care," cried Louellen. "It's not hysterics! But I can't—I can't—I hate him, I tell you."

Jane West went back frankly to primitive methods. She clapped a hand over Louellen's mouth, and with the other she gave her a hard quick shake. "Be *still,*" she said, in a voice that no one, not even Amos West, had ever disregarded. "Stop calling out. There's nothing the matter with you but hysterics, I tell you. You act like you had no sense. Get a holt of yourself. Annie'll be back here in a minute. Everybody'll hear you!" She had an instant's flash of what a joyful morsel of tattle this would be to the people downstairs should they hear. "Set down," she went on, and pushed Louellen into a chair. She went to the washstand

and brought a wet towel and wiped her face, quickly, carefully. "Now you're all right," she said. "You give me a turn!"

Louellen sat still, drooping, stunned into acquiescence. Her mother watched her anxiously.

"That you, Annie?" she asked, without turning her head as the younger girl came in. "John Henry out there? All right. You go on downstairs and wait, like I said. Where's your Pa? Tell him I want him to stand right by me."

She turned back to Louellen. "Smell the salts again," she said, in her normal voice. "Now—you come along—"

The girl rose, obedient, piteous. At this moment she could not combat—she was overpowered, beaten down. The gold watch dangled, a significant weight, from its massive chain, and her mother tucked it into her bosom.

"Now, take John Henry's arm—" John Henry looming tall, twitching with nerves, held out a stiff elbow, and she laid limp fingers in the crook of it.

"Bring her right on after me," commanded Mrs. West, and turning, stepped majestically to the stairs—but at the first step she paused to see if they were following. Yes,—it was all right. She went on down.

Below, Annie, pink with the pleasure of being so much in the public eye, waited beside a straight and stolid Hance. The faces within the parlor turned with impatience toward the door. Mrs. West entered, saw that all was in order and took her place beside Amos. She hoped that no one would detect from her look that she had just been through a scene. No, they would set down any signs of agitation to a mother's natural emotion. She was just beginning to get the full force of the shock. She watched with a hard suspense that made her pulses pound in her wrists, and her throat swell and hurt. It seemed an age before Louellen and John Henry came into the room.

But they were in, and behind them marched Annie and Hance, straight as ramrods, highly self-conscious. Louellen was white, whiter than she had been upstairs, her face set

stonily, her eyes dropped. John Henry stared straight ahead of him, intent, his gaze narrowed and burningly eager.

"Solemn as a funeral," breathed Clara Devens into Rena's willing ear.

A hideous qualm of doubt overtook Jane West as she saw them.

"But I don't see what I could've done differently," she argued with herself. "The minister in the house and the wedding dinner cooked. And all the relatives!"

No,—she simply couldn't have done anything else. Of course it was nothing but hysterics. She felt a little upset herself,—there was no denying it, these last few weeks, and all this fuss and to-do and hurrah-boys round the house was a strain. But into Jane West's unimpressionable mind there crept a question that she could not suppress—was even a broken-off marriage, a broken-off at the last minute marriage, with all the attendant scandal, with the ravings of Amos West—"He'd've near about lost his mind," ran her commentary—with all the disrepute and shaming hue-and-cry of query and criticism—was it worse than to have Louellen marry, feeling as she did? Louellen, her firstborn, her nearest and dearest, closest in sympathy and understanding, in whose girlhood she saw her own girlhood repeated, like a dear remembered melody,—to break or mar Louellen—involuntarily she clasped her hands over her heart and, deaf to mellifluous swoopings of Bro' Truitt's voice, she prayed fervently that she might not be guilty of such sin. And she knew that never again so long as she lived would she be sure, firmly, decisively sure, of what was right and what was wrong. This tremendous moment would leave her certainty of judgment warped and scarred. John Henry's hawk profile—she saw it now with a divination of Louellen's revulsion against it. She heard her daughter's faint responses with a stab of terror. She was driven to put her fine white linen handkerchief up to her face during the prayer, thankful for the mask, and she did not listen to Bro' Truitt's petition. Instead she was beg-

ging, imploring, "God—have mercy on her—have mercy," frantically, futilely.

The babble of voices, the spontaneous movements—like a released spring—of the children who had been severely quelled while the ceremony was going on, the change of the ministerial orotund into the flutings of secular congratulations, warned Jane West to bring down her handkerchief and command her faculties. She moved forward and essayed a smile, at the sight of Bro' Truitt imprinting a chaste kiss on the bride's cheek.

"Let me be the first to call you Mrs. Hyde," he remarked, playfully. "And to wish you the greatest possible happiness."

Jane West almost shoved him away. Once more she took her daughter in her arms, anxiously, leaning to kiss her. And now Louellen lifted her drooping eyes and looked full at her, and in that look was such arraignment, such condemnation that Jane West, unimaginative as she was, almost cried out her alarm.

It was all over in a second. Aunt Lena Hyde was there, openly weeping, but telling every one that she always cried at weddings and not to mind her. Aunt Ella Devens was there with good wishes elegantly phrased. Other aunts, cousins, pressed around. Louellen was kissed and hugged indiscriminately. John Henry's hand was nearly shaken off. Several of the aunts kissed him, also, but Great-Aunt Virgie declined this pleasure with the only witticism of her visit: "I might get the habit of kissing other women's husbands, and you don't know where such as that'll lead you"—a statement provoking infinite hilarity, which so pleased the old lady that she repeated it at intervals for the rest of the day.

"Kind of a near shave, there, John Henry," said Uncle Tracy, rallying him. "I thought Louellen wasn't going to answer up at all."

"I guess *not,*" answered John Henry. "She kept me hanging on a good while without giving me much satisfaction, but once she'd promised I wasn't scared."

"It's a good thing to have a woman that's not too glib about answering back," chipped in Uncle Ben, with facetious intent. "That's not my wife's trouble, oh, no, not her trouble at all."

"It's not my husband's trouble, either," said Aunt Marcia, neatly, thereby turning the laugh against the men.

There was more clumsy, good-natured joking, and a good bit of teasing of Annie and Rena and Clara, and the other marriageable damsels, productive of many blushes and flutterings in the virginal dovecote.

In all the joking and laughter and general commotion it passed without comment that Louellen was very quiet. John Henry made up for it. He came out of his usual shell of unresponsiveness and standoffishness and laughed and joked with any of them. If Louellen was still pale, his face was flushed deeply through his dark skin. He was assured, almost boisterous. He kept a hard possessive grasp on Louellen's arm.

Presently the elders of the party were summoned to dinner. There was not room for all, so the children must wait for second table, at which there rose shrill complaint, quickly stifled by parental admonition.

"I must say I never saw a more elegant looking table in my life!" was the appreciative comment of Miss Becca Simpson as she balanced her rotund little self on a chair. It was fitting that the first compliment should come from one who was not a member of the family, but the aunts on both sides took it up and Jane West was deluged.

"It's a perfect picture." "Look at that two-colored jelly piled up in blocks." "I haven't seen a Charlotte Polonaise since I was a girl—so much trouble to make." "And the wedding-cake—that's the last feather."

The wedding-cake—a glittering white castle of three graduated tiers, stood in state on a high crystal platter, with a huge square Charlotte Polonaise at each side, iced in pale yellow patterned like lace with silver dragées. Amber and ruby jelly made jeweled battlements of color beyond these.

Tall glasses of celery were sentinels to shining silver castors which held the table condiments. This was the center of the long table. At each end were tureens of soup, plates of bread, biscuits, butter, pickles, all set with absolute symmetry. There was no decoration—as such. All was there to be eaten.

And it was eaten. After the soup came the hams, the turkeys, the chicken pies, the vegetables, endlessly. And after these the frozen custard, the cakes, the pies, the syllabubs. Conversation, which had slacked over the heaped plates of the former course, became more general now.

"But, Louellen, you've not eat enough to keep a bird alive," said Aunt Lena Hyde, tactlessly.

"Oh, I've had plenty," said Louellen.

"I don't know when I've had such a meal," said Tracy West. "I'd be willing to bet a levy against a fi'penny bit that I've put on ten pounds. If I was home I'd unbutton my weskit."

Then Louellen must cut the wedding-cake, and a big knife was put into her hand. The icing crumbled with sweetness, the perfume of the rich fruited loaves went strongly over the room, dominating all the other spicy food odors.

"I'm going to take a piece to dream on," announced Rena.

Then some one glanced at the clock. "You better be getting your things on, you two," the bride and groom were warned. "Takes a full three-quarters of an hour to drive down to the Bridge."

"And the children are near 'bout starved," added an anxious mother.

Louellen went upstairs, attended by Annie and Rena. She put on her new brown cashmere mantle, lined with crimson, trimmed with passementerie. She put on her brown velvet hat with its short curled feather, her brown kid gloves. She picked up her crimson and brown knotwork purse, that Annie had made for her. Her brown leather valise was declared ready and snapped shut, and she gave a last glance around her room.

"Sis, darling, I'll miss you so," cried Annie, sentimentally, tears all ready.

"They're calling downstairs," reminded Rena.

Every one crowded around now, and Louellen was kissed and hugged again. Then John Henry hustled her into the back seat of a double buggy, with closed curtains. Rachel's brother, Edward, a middle-aged negro with dignified side-whiskers, was the coachman, and he had groomed the horses to satin, the buckles on the harness shone, and he himself was clean as yellow soap and hot water could make him.

They drove off amidst much shouting and waving. The company went reluctantly back to the house, Aunt Ella with a restraining hand on her frisettes, ruffled in the November air.

"A likely looking couple," "Louellen's the *best* girl—" "A real advantageous marriage whichever way you look at it," the chorus began again. But Aunt Marcia, more observant than the others, confided to Aunt Sarah, "Funny Jane never kissed her good-by."

"Well, with all that push around—and hurrying so—" It seemed a satisfactory explanation to both of them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JOHN HENRY and Louellen drove away into the graying afternoon. A cloud had come over the sun, and a cold wind blew wildly across the level fields.

"Feels like November, sure enough," said John Henry. He took her hand, furtively, so that Edward would not see, and he was still smiling, animated.

Louellen nodded her head, but did not answer or look at him. On the pretext of arranging her mantle, she pulled her hand away from him, and then took her purse in it to prevent his getting hold of it again.

"I expect you're right tired," he said tenderly. "It must have been an awful jam around there these last few days."

"Yes, I'm tired," she said. And with the words she felt an immense weight of weariness, physical and mental. She was tired, tired of battling, fighting, running for escape and finding none. All of her body and her soul ached from it. That last hopeless outburst before the ceremony had been the final effort, and now, exhaustion.

John Henry went on talking. "Aunt Lena'll only stay two-three days after we get back," he said, as if he had not told her that a hundred times before, "then we'll have the place to ourselves. She wants to show you where everything is, and give you some of her pet recipes—Aunt Lena don't believe anybody can cook for me as well as she can. And there's two-three things she does put together better'n I ever tasted. You ask her about her grape ketchup."

It was that settled marital flavor about John Henry that had always irritated Louellen. She had to remind herself that now he had a right to employ it. She let him talk on. She had her thoughts. She remembered that night of the raided camp-meeting when she had promised to marry him, a desperate gesture designed to bring balance to her toppling

world. It had but overturned it completely. She had done it, she had brought it on herself. She was married and she'd have to do her duty. There seemed to be a lot of talk concerning the duty of marriage, first and last,—to women, that is. Bro' Truitt,—yes, and Sister Truitt,—and several of the aunts,—had spoken of it with that insidious unctuousness that promised unpleasantness. She was to be a good dutiful wife to John Henry. She had publicly avowed her intention to love, honor and obey him. Through her fatigue, her almost drugged fatigue, she felt a thrill of ironic laughter. Love John Henry! She would as lief love Bro' Truitt.

She was glad when they reached the Bridge, and there was a chance to move. John Henry gave Edward a silver dollar, and the negro man wished them his "Bes' respec's an' hearty good wishes," but his melancholy eyes looked at Louellen with profound pity. In her silence, her unresponsiveness, he had, with all a negro's primitive shrewdness, read her state of mind. He touched his cap and drove away, leaving them there on the wharf with their valises beside them, the wide river a ruffled cold expanse of steel under a steel sky, the raw wind still blowing up.

They stood there without speaking for John Henry's trivial talk had deserted him. With their noticeably new clothes, their shiny bags, they were strange figures on the little old gray wharf. There seemed to be no other passengers, but presently the warehouse at the side disgorged the agent, a placid little man, inquisitive, chatty and kindly. He spat a stream of tobacco juice into the water and approached them. Maybe the young lady, he suggested, would be more comfortable in the waiting room. Warmer there. Blew up cold so sudden that he'd started a fire. He certainly did hate these first cold days, seemed like they pierced through you worse than midwinter. Boat was a little late, but she'd be along pretty soon. He pointed a soiled stubby finger and squinted up-river. Wasn't that maybe now her smoke?

They looked, and saw a feather of black laid along the horizon. As they waited the feather became a smudge, and presently took definite shape and increasing size. At last the long white steamer swam into view around the last bend, as graceful and untroubled as a swan. Then sounded the deep blast of her whistle. They could hear the murmurous beat of the paddles timed to the rhythmic see-saw of the walking beam. Gold and bright color blazoned on her great round wheel boxes, warming the dull day. As she came alongside, negro boys leaned out with ropes to throw, and the little wharf agent became agile and muscular and flung the knotted hawsers over their posts with one hand. From above, the Captain, bearded, ruddy, leaned from his post in the pilot house, like a benevolent Jove surveying a striving but hopelessly inferior humanity. Now and then his voice dominated the universe with a commanding bellow. The deck-hands ran out the gang-plank with a concerted, not unmusical shout. Stevedores rattled past with hand trucks laden with freight, and rattled back again with local packages for Baltimore. They yelled to each other as they ran,—and a languid purser, his blue cap set at a gallant angle, watched and checked them.

In the midst of this mêlée the saloon steward, a proud fat darky in a white coat, came out and took charge of John Henry and Louellen, capturing their baggage, summoning them to follow him up the gang-plank into the dark cavern of the lower deck, thence by shining brass-bound stairs to the upper saloon, crimson carpeted, mirrored, with white walls of staterooms, each door striped with gold. "Bridal room, yessah?" he asked knowingly of John Henry, and conducted the pair to the last stateroom aft, reserved for such occasions. It was twice the size of any of the others, with berths of shining walnut, draped with lace curtains. There was a corner washstand with pink china ewer and basin, a small table, a chair, a mirror fastened to the wall.

To be alone in a bedroom with a man embarrassed Louellen painfully. She stood by the door, and held it partly

open. This, this sort of abominable thing, then, was marriage. When she thought of the coming night, she felt sure she would die. Yes, she would certainly die. She could not look at the steward, or at John Henry either.

"I'm going out on the back deck," she said, and left them in the middle of the payment for the stateroom.

Thank heaven, there were not many passengers, and those who were on board were so occupied with children, lunch-boxes, and, among the men, discussion of crops and politics, that they paid but casual attention to Louellen, hurrying past them with her eyes down, in all her new brave wedding finery. Her cheeks were not pale now. They flamed and burned, as if the blood was coming through her skin. She put the palms of her hands on her cheeks and could feel them burning through her gloves. Her thoughts whirled. She looked at the cold gray water with its crest of white behind the boat's stern, and wondered if it was very painful to drown. With her hands now on the rail she leaned over and wondered intensely if the water was very cold, if one choked and smothered, if the cold water would press on one, a dead and clinging weight.

"Don't stand so close," said John Henry, coming suddenly beside her with that hateful grasp on her arm. "If the boat gave a lurch you might go overboard. Let's sit down."

She waited while he dragged out two deck chairs from a great pile, unfolded them and placed them where they would be sheltered from the wind. Save for them the deck was empty.

"Would you rather be out here in the cold than inside?" he asked, and she could only answer him by sitting down hastily.

Then she found speech: "You needn't think I'm going to—to stay in that—little stateroom—with you to-night," she gasped, feeling that shame would certainly kill her, but forced to tell him. "I—I'll sit up all night—out here—or anywhere—"

"Now, Louellen, don't be childish," he began coaxingly.

"What's the use of going on like this? We're married, and you—you got to get used to me sooner or later. You don't want to make a show of yourself before the whole boat, do you?"

"I don't care—I—I—won't go—in there—"

Her voice had risen a little, and so did his. "I've stood a good bit from you, first and last, but I'm not going to stand this."

His tone implied that being now sure in possession he need no longer truckle to her whimsies. They sat awhile in sullen silence, but his eyes took note of her, her color, her quivering lips, her soft hair, her melting slenderness, the stormy rise and fall of her young breasts beneath her mantle, and his unappeased hunger for her laid hold on him.

"You—you don't understand," he said, hoarsely. "You don't know what you're talking about. Louellen—if you knew—how I've wanted you—and wanted you—it's—" His voice reached a fanatical cry. "I've questioned the mercy of God—that he should put such feelings on me—oh—there's no use you talking like this—*now.*" There was a trembling zestful emphasis on the word. It was as if he thanked God that the marriage ceremony sanctioned his lust, permitted him to satiate his appetite.

The proud fat darky steward opened the door and stepped out on deck, ringing a proud fat brass bell, which was the announcement of supper. Yellow light from the upper saloon, and warmth and a whiff of hot cooked foods rushed out to them with the opening of the door and restored their sanity. Louellen almost ran in from the deck. She might have been escaping from one of the larger carnivora. John Henry followed closely after. He had no intention of being more than an inch away from her side until he got her safely into the bridal stateroom, and the key turned on the inside, by his own hand.

More brass-bound stairs and soft crimson carpets made a path of glory to the dining saloon. There were long tables, already set with plates, knives and forks, and goblets hold-

ing red and white fringed napkins folded in jaunty triangles.

Waiters came hurrying in a quick procession with fried chicken, fried fish, potato cakes, fried oysters, cornbread, beefsteak, each in its little individual dish. Hot biscuit, rolls and coffee followed. It was an ample meal, excellently cooked, clean.

"You didn't eat much dinner," said John Henry, in a low voice. "You ought to try to make out a good supper."

They sat at the captain's table and that genial dignitary offered conversation to John Henry, as man to man, concerning the weather, and the possible roughness of the Bay in a storm, and the lessening of travel in the fall—until just before Christmas—and such-like nothings. Women were not supposed to have opinions or make observations publicly while men talked. There was another woman at the table, but with two children, and wholly engrossed in seeing that since the supper cost the extortionate sum of fifty cents apiece, they should get their money's worth. Louellen was thankful for that. She had the feeling that another woman could, merely by looking at her, read her stark mind.

Supper was over at last, and there was nothing to do but climb again the elegance of the stairs to the upper saloon. John Henry stuck close beside her, and he held her arm, and unless she pulled and jerked with violence she knew she could not get out of his grasp. He walked along beside her.

"Louellen," he gulped desperately, close to her ear, "don't look so scared. You make me feel just awful. I—I'm not going to hurt you."

She hardly knew in what direction they were going, but he did. Arrived in front of their stateroom door he dexterously unlocked it, and—with a swift glance to be sure that there was no one near—flung his arm around her and half-lifted, half-pushed her over the threshold, and swung the door to behind them and locked it.

She leaned away from him, pushing him back from her

with all her strength. But he was strong, stronger than she. In the close nearness of the tiny stateroom he seemed to be taller, stronger than he had ever been, dark, inexorable, craving, devouring.

"Let me alone—let me alone," she begged, sobbingly.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THEY returned from their wedding trip, not so much changed as revealed to each other. In John Henry Hyde the humble uncertain tormented lover had turned to a husband demanding and receiving ample submission, jealous of his power, exacting, autocratic. He was thoroughly in accord with Saint Paul's statement that the woman was the weaker vessel, and because she was weaker she must be dominated and ruled strictly according to man's wishes and ideas. He had always liked to "break" the young colts to harness. This satisfaction, intensified a thousand times, he found in bringing Louellen to his will. All that was cruel and relentless in him warred with her, submerged her. Her shrinking, her helplessness, only whetted him. Everything that was bestial and ugly in his nature, long hidden and restrained, but stealthily active in his imagination always, now demanded and received utmost gratification. That she was unwilling, unresponsive, added a morbid relish to his unhealthy enjoyment.

Nor did he spare her mentally. He blotted on her cleanness of thought all possible foulness that he had long treasured unsaid. He was a gloating reader of Leviticus, and all the franker and more flavorous parts of the Old Testament and the Apocraypha. His imagination stank with such filth, and now, to his wife, he could reveal it. If he had married a robust vulgarian, as wisely obscene as himself, they might, perhaps, by mutual revelation have relieved their natures of such abnormality and achieved a healthy animal life together. But Louellen's stunned and unbelieving loathing piqued him only to further smearing and daubing.

As for Louellen, she at last found that state of endurance wherein one suffers passively, but not actively. She could feel and hear no more. Her senses refused to receive any

further impression. She was benumbed, stupefied. She could not even summon a combative disgust and hate for her husband, he was so monstrous to her that she could only submit in a dumb agony of mind and body. She seemed to have fallen into such an abyss of foulness that she could never climb out again. Her innocence was stripped and polluted. She was so far away from the girl of a week before that she could not imagine herself that untouched, unstressed creature. She was a hundred years old, nay, a thousand, and the sight of her youth in a mirror was only one more lie. For she had come to feel that everything was a lie. That all the talk of goodness and happiness and duty and the love of God—even His very existence—were lies. Why, if there was a God, should she who had never knowingly done an evil thing in her life, have been netted and imprisoned with this creature of slime, —and with all public approbation and acclaim? No, there was nothing, only unimaginable wrong and evil and defilement.

There was a slight mitigation of her state after they had returned to their home. John Henry was at once less with her, claimed by his fields, his barns, his stables. Aunt Lena's presence checked his putrescent tongue, and the sensitive spinster was pleased and cheered by Louellen's eager urging of her to stay with them, to defer her going back to her people—at least until the winter should be over. The winters up North were so severe, Louellen reminded her anxiously, and she was not strong. And she'd be so welcome to stay. Aunt Lena finally decided that she would stay until after Christmas.

"Though I should think you two'd want to be by yourselves," she added, a little reproachfully, as if Louellen was not living up to her idea of a fond young wife.

There was a certain mitigation, too, in having work. Louellen must help to cook, to look after the poultry, and the dairy. There was no servant, like Rachel, at home. And she had to learn the house and its ways, for every

house has ways, to a housekeeper. She seized on all of this as something stable and normal in her demolished world. With these to think about she could cover up the things John Henry had told her, push them back and down, hide them a little from herself.

"You go at things too hard," Aunt Lena counseled her. "You scrub when there isn't any real need of it. My gracious, I sh'd think you'd want to be dressed up in your wedding finery, out paying visits in the buggy, instead of down on your knees on the kitchen floor."

Louellen could not tell her—indeed, she only knew it subconsciously—that if you could get tired enough you stopped thinking, and that her wedding finery was so hateful to her that she would have burned it had she dared.

On the first Sunday after their return they were to go to church, where she would "come out as a bride" and then take dinner at her father's house. Aunt Lena would stay at home—by preference, as she knew what was expected of her. Louellen had not seen her mother and father since her wedding day, but Annie had driven over for an evening, escorted by Hance. Amos West had developed a painful sciatica, and been confined to the house, and Jane had stayed with him. The truth of it was that both Louellen and Jane dreaded to meet. There was too much said and unsaid between them. Jane had not liked Annie's report. "She's awful quiet, Ma. Not a bit lively. And he kind of lords it over everything. Of course Louellen always was steadier than me, but when I get married I'm not going to settle down to any old seven-and-six like that, right off." She put her head on one side like a wise little bird and added reflectively, "I don't think I like John Henry much, Ma, even if he is in the family. I don't believe I ever did like him."

"You oughtn't to say things like that about John Henry," warned her mother.

"Oh, I wouldn't say it to anybody else—but it's true."

No, Annie had not been reassuring. Jane West had

waited for Sunday impatiently, and gone to church fidgety with conjectures and fears. Amos was not able to go, so she and Annie drove in alone. Their pew was second behind John Henry's, so they could see Louellen plainly, and at first glimpse of her her mother's heart swelled with pity and indignation. This frozen white creature her Louellen, her freshness already dimmed, her youth subtly past! She took scant satisfaction in Louellen's black silk dress with its jetted polonaise and plaited underskirt, her ruched dolman of black velvet, though when they were made she had been maternally satisfied that Louellen would "come out" far more magnificently than any bride the congregation had seen in years. Jane West's eyes detected something else: "Why, she's lost flesh. That dress is loose on her!"

Her fiercely scrutinizing gaze went to John Henry, complacent and high-colored, satisfied, dominant, and read the answer.

"Gorged," said Jane West to herself, succinctly.

Louellen could feel her mother's eyes and thoughts, was naked in body and mind before her. This she had not, in her preoccupation with worse matters, anticipated, and it brought a final wrench of anguish to her consciousness. But she kept her eyes on her hymnbook and sang with the congregation, dropped down and bent her head in prayer, and finally composed herself to give ostensible attention to the sermon. She wished Bro' Truitt would preach on forever. It was peaceful to sit still, even with John Henry at her elbow, for he could not speak to her, nor put his gross hands on her. The church was warm. A tingling whiff from Miss Becca Simpson's clove-apple, as that restless little person drew it from her reticule and sniffed at it, came to Louellen and she closed her eyes a moment. It reminded her of her childhood when she and Annie had occupied themselves during one whole Sunday sermon by taking the cloves out of just such a rustic trophy, and had somehow managed to do it without drawing their father's severe eyes upon their occupation. But—when they stood up to sing

the little black spices had showered to the floor, and the mischief was out.

They had been punished. Louellen remembered how she had cried, cried as if to break her heart. But all that was a thousand years ago. A thousand years of wrong and bitterness and misery lay between. Now she was old, older than her mother, infinitely more knowledgeable. She turned her head a little away from her husband so that she could not see him, not even from the corners of her eyes. It was something to be spared the sight of his hands with the long black hairs on them, and that predatory hawk's beak of his. Yet she could not lose the consciousness of his presence, nor of his domination. She wondered how many Sundays she would have to sit like this beside him, hating him. She wondered how many years she would have to live. Her thoughts beat hard, like caged wild birds.

It was not so difficult to speak to her mother as she had feared, for Annie pressed forward and seized her sister, and in the impetus of her grasp Louellen and Jane had exchanged hand-clasp and kiss almost before they knew it. Bro' Truitt was approaching, too, urbane, chastely jocular. He must shake hands with them. Other friends crowded near. Miss Becca pulled down Louellen's cheek for a kiss. "I'll be out to see you soon," she promised, "and you better not invite me to stay unless you really want me, for I've got a real visiting-round fit coming on me, and it's getting worse by the minute."

"I'm coming too," declared Rena Massey. "Let's go together, Miss Becca."

Louellen was glad when all this was over, and they could get outside. "You ride along home with John Henry, Annie," said Jane West, "and Louellen'll go with me."

But when they were in the buggy together Jane West offered nothing of significance. "I was sorry not to come over with Annie the other night, but your Pa's been so poorly with his rheumatics. I get right out of patience with him—he won't do what Doc' Tithelow says, and when

he's worse he gets mad. I've had to iron his back till my arm's wore out."

"It's in his back, then, this time?"

"Back and legs, both. Oh, he's got a dose. He suffers a good bit."

The subject seemed ended. Louellen did not start another.

"When's Lena Hyde going back to York State?" asked her mother.

"Not right away—maybe she'll stay till after Christmas."

Jane West heard this with the air of one who must look a thing over on all sides before delivering opinion.

"John Henry ask her to?"

"He don't care," fenced Louellen.

"I shouldn't think—" began Mrs. West, and then stopped. "Well, she's not hard to get along with," she temporized.

"No, she's real pleasant."

This seemed to put another stop in the conversation. The trivialities thus far spoken meant nothing. Louellen was aware that her mother was with all her strength begging her to tell her, to confide in her, to let her give what help and comfort she could. But the very enormity of the wrong she had suffered made her keep silence. She would have died rather than put into words the least of John Henry's marital obscenities, or even intimate them. No loyalty to him held her back. It was not that. It was for herself. She would hide from every living soul that she had been so besmutted, so shamed. She had reached a depth where no one might stoop to raise her. Her mother's silent insistence distressed her, but could not compel her.

"Did you do any shopping in Baltimore?" asked Jane West, at last.

Louellen roused herself. "Nothing much. We went into Posner's one day and I saw some tablecloths. We went out and had supper with Cousin Bob Devens and his wife. She's real sweet. Very dressy, too."

"What did you wear?"

"My barège." (She would not say "my wedding dress.") "She thought my watch was a beauty,—and it was a lot prettier than hers."

She looked at her mother with troubled love. This scrap of gossip and compliment must serve her in place of the truth she craved. And Jane West was pleased.

"I'm glad of that. What sort of a supper did they have?"

"Nothing extra. And she complained all the time about the price of food, until her victuals almost stuck in my throat. Of course it is high—eggs twenty-five cents a dozen!"

"Mercy *sakes,* Louellen, that's awful!"

Louellen saw that she was diverting her mother from her purpose. She cudgeled her memory for more details. "They used silver forks and white-handled knives with silver blades, and the goblets were a new style, thin kind, almost snap in your fingers. They had oyster stew and hot biscuit and chicken salad, and ice cream and two kinds of cake. And strawberry preserves, with a syrup as thin as water."

"Had she made 'em?"

"I think so. I'd never have put 'em on the table if they'd been mine—or, I might've drained off the syrup and cooked it down thick with more sugar. She had some preserved melon rind, too, but it was kind of greenish."

"She's seemingly a poor housekeeper. What kind of cake?"

"One was marble, and the other was a plain loaf cake with raisins, and she'd let the icing get too hard."

There was infinite possibility in the subject of the Devenses. Having got them started and her mother's interest aroused, Louellen spun them out to great length. She managed to keep them going until they reached the lane that led to the West home. The horse slowed into a walk. Both women suddenly realized that this was their last chance to talk alone to-day. Once in the house Annie would be omnipresent.

They realized something more—that Jane West had asked for confidence and been denied it; that Louellen had evaded her, knowingly. The knowledge was a barrier between them. Just as they reached the house Jane West made one more effort to surmount this barrier. "You know, Louellen," she said, hesitatingly, "I'm always here, and—and—thinking about you—and ready to help you—no matter what."

She surprised a hard faint smile, almost of derision, on Louellen's lips. Her answer kept the barrier definitely between them.

"Yes, I know, Ma," was all she said.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A MARRIAGE in which the woman is unwilling is not a marriage, but a bondage. Nor is it a bondage that lightens with time and habitude; rather it darkens with hate, deepens with bitterness, is shot through with pangs of swift and terrible loathing. The woman who must live in such bondage must either break or harden. There was enough of old Amos West's steel in Louellen to keep her from breaking, and slowly, after the first hideous numbness and stupefaction was over, she began to fight, not to escape from her bondage, for that was unimaginable to her, but to preserve something inviolable of her personality. Her vitality revived, and so did her determination. She was married to this man, and she must therefore live with him, but she would, in essentials, be herself and not wholly his creature. She schemed and planned for it.

It began in small matters. He disliked change with all the passion of a set and narrow nature. It disconcerted and annoyed him. One night he entered their bedroom to find that every piece of furniture stood elsewhere than in its accustomed place.

"What in time did you do this for?" he asked with instant irritation. "I hate to have things pulled around."

She had calculated her answer, and gave the only one which he could not gainsay. "Mother always moved things every once in so often so's the carpet wouldn't get faded in spots."

His avaricious streak warned him there was sense in this, so he assented, grumbling. She smiled to herself later, lying beside him in the darkness, that faint ironic smile which would presently shape her soft and yielding lips. She would now change all the furniture, in all the rooms, as she wished. He could no longer be sure of finding things as he was

used, when he entered. It was a little thing, but not little to her, for she knew he would not like it, and yet he could not blame her, nor stop her. She had been feeling him out, sounding him, detached and watchful under her endurance.

In some ways he seemed to her like her own father, whose narrow egotism glorified his own possessions, and whose stubborn will insisted on complete domination. But Amos West was not stingy and John Henry was.

This showed when in the usual farm life routine there came the question of wifely perquisites. It developed that Aunt Lena had exchanged the eggs and butter at the store for necessities of the house and table, renewed linens, small utensils, dry groceries. When there was a surplus it went unquestioningly to John Henry and he watched the account sharply. But Louellen made a stand.

"Mother always had the egg and butter money that was over at home," she said.

"You don't need it," said John Henry, heatedly. "You can trade in for everything you want, and you got the interest on that thousand dollars your Pa gave you for spending. That's plenty."

"Mother always had it," she persisted, mildly, but watching him in entire detachment, intent on gaining this small advantage. "I'm going to ask Pa if she didn't."

John Henry, like many other mean men, was keenly sensitive that he should not appear so, and he was specially eager to stand well with Amos West. He could not bear to have his father-in-law know his smallness.

"I don't want you carrying tales to your father."

"It's not carrying tales. I reckon there's no harm in asking him. He'd think it was funny to hear you accuse me of carrying tales to him." She was still calm, detached.

The matter rested there for some days, but it was uneasily uppermost in John Henry's mind. Amos West had recovered a little from his rheumatism, and he and Jane were to drive over on Sunday afternoon. On the Saturday

before, when the eggs were in the basket and the butter in the tins for the store, he told Louellen casually: "I don't mind if you have what's over from the trading for yourself. You must take care of it, though, and not spend it for trash." He saved his face by the admonition.

There was no slightest trace of tenderness in his love for her; it was all cruelly possessive. Any real endearment he would have thought soft, a weakness, and there again he resembled Amos West. And in his stiff-necked fanatical religious fervor. But there the likeness ceased, for Amos West's Malachi-like exterior covered no fetid deeps of sensual depravity. He was cold and clear all the way through. Having perceived that, Louellen clung to it. It helped her, strengthened her to feel her father's difference in that. She was glad that her mother had been spared her own ordeal. She felt older, more experienced than her mother.

The good understanding between her mother and herself was gradually renewed, but with a difference. They managed to bridge their unspoken chasms, but they were aware of these chasms. Jane West was never quite so happy as she had been before Louellen's marriage. She was never quite at ease about her. The lovelessness, the strain of her daughter, was always apparent to her, and it was all she could do to be decently amiable to John Henry. She was rejoiced when she saw Louellen rousing herself from her inertness, asserting herself, and gave her little hints, mere threads of suggestion.

"There never was a man so set he couldn't be managed, but it's not done by nagging and fussing. Lots of women say nothing and get their own way—so easy."

And again: "Nothing's as bad as we think it is. We've only got to live one day at a time."

Or: "There's always some means to get round things we don't like. All is, we mustn't sit down and succumb."

She mentioned—more than once—"Being married's no worse than being single after you get used to it."

Louellen understood that this was solicitude and counsel. She listened, with her new hard little smile, that had been born with her first thwarting of John Henry. All very easy for her mother to talk. She'd had her life. She'd been through nothing—nothing—of the blasting experiences that had seared and scarred Louellen. She would listen respectfully and make no answer.

It was all of little use. Of that she was profoundly, tragically sure. There was no escape from the mesh into which she had flung herself. Her little stirrings of conflict, her small victories over John Henry were almost as humiliating to her as if she had yielded to him and bent to his will in every petty detail. To live out her life—in this sort of thing! The dreary flatness of it! But she could not keep her from going on with it; something within her forced her to it.

There was the matter of the everyday dishes. She did not like them, and he would not buy others. "These are plenty good enough. Aunt Lena and I used 'em."

Secretly Louellen questioned Aunt Lena. "Do you really like the dishes—so cracked and heavy?"

"I think they're awful. But John Henry's near. Long's a thing c'n be used he wants it used. And the best dishes is nice."

Yes, the best dishes were nice, but none too nice to use every day. Louellen inaugurated a wholly unnecessary cleaning of the dining-room cupboard. She piled the despised dishes on the table, and mounted a step ladder to scour. It was not her fault if the ladder buckled and she and the heavy pail of water fell on the table.

"You might have killed yourself," gasped Aunt Lena, rushing downstairs at the sound of the crash.

It was a desperate venture. But the dishes were hopelessly smashed. Louellen, in spite of bruises and cuts, looked at the table for supper set with the best dishes even as the Roman conquerors reviewed their chained captives. She reflected that she would have broken those dishes or broken

her neck. She was amazed at her own determination.

"If you want me to," she told John Henry, with assumed meekness, "I'll buy a new set, soon's I get enough money ahead in trading at the store."

But something wholesome and sound within her constantly rebelled at such petty duplicity and subterfuge. "I'll soon be old and hard and mean and hateful if I keep on this way," she told herself. "And yet I can't help wanting to trick John Henry, he's so cock-sure that he can lord it over everything and everybody. He's so bound and bent on having his own way."

The house was not very large and was an easy one to keep clean. She and Aunt Lena kept it going admirably with scant labor. Then there were chickens to attend to, butter and cheese to be made, but these were not great tasks. For diversion there was prayer-meeting on Wednesday nights, service once, and usually twice, on Sundays, a drive over to the Wests', an occasional visitor, a more occasional visit and a Saturday afternoon trip to town.

The Hyde farm was a much greater distance from the town, and off the beaten road, so there was not so much coming and going as there had been in her old home. It all left Louellen with too much vacant time. Aunt Lena crocheted interminably, in a rocking chair by the fire. But Louellen's youth and raw discontent chafed at such inactivity. Even the extra tasks she inaugurated—cleaning where it was still spotless and cooking elaborate dishes were not enough to keep her occupied. The nearest neighbors were renters, and therefore not of her own social class. She might, now and then, go to see Mrs. Staten or Mrs. Grable, but it was no real interest or pleasure. And on the other side, fields adjoining, was Mart Bladen.

Early in her days of marriage she had discovered that the Bladen house was visible from her upper windows, glimpsed through its thick trees. She had not looked toward it often, but sometimes at night she could see a tiny point

of light, tempting, twinkling. At first she hardly noticed it, she was so dull, so wasted, so stupefied. But as her forces rallied she began to look for it, to think of it, to hope for it each night.

Miss Becca had told her, as part of the neighborhood gossip, that the Kemp crowd had been pretty well subdued since the sheriff warned them, but that there was a good bit of quiet sport still going on.

"Playing cards," said Miss Becca with relish, "and cock fighting, and of course drinking. They're all scamps, every one." It was evident that Miss Becca enjoyed the pageantry of scampishness.

Rena had added, privately, that people said Mart Bladen was drinking twice as much as any of the rest. "Ever since you got married," she added enviously to Louellen. Rena wished that she had the power to drive a man to wild courses. Dan Fisher was a perfect sheep so far as dash and daring and despair went. That is, he would be if she essayed to make him despair, but she did not, for the very practical reason that she might get no one else she liked better.

Annie had confirmed Rena's statement about Mart. He was in his old courses, but "Della Layton's crazier about him than ever. Everybody thinks she's going into a decline and all because she can't get him. He won't have a thing to do with her."

Louellen had hugged that bit of satisfaction to herself in silence. Oh, she was glad, glad that Mart would have nothing to do with Della! She could not have him, but then, neither could any other woman. She looked out at his gleaming, far-away light that night and flung her gladness toward it.

The winter was an open one, mild, with little snow. When her fits of restlessness came on her she would wrap herself in a big shawl, tie her blue wool fascinator over her head and run out into the air, prowl about the barn and stables, pet the barn cats, give the chickens an extra feed, and

sometimes wander out across the fields, keeping well away from that part of the land where John Henry and his hired men were husking corn. A good half mile from the house across the pasture ran the creek, a clear shallow stream, on its way to the river that touched Mart's acres, but not John Henry's, dappled in the sunlight, its eddies filled thick with brown leaves from the trees and undergrowth that protected it. This solitude Louellen loved. There were low scraps of bank where the grass was still green, little pockets of warmth and shelter in the winter sun, and when she had found one of these she would sit there, watching the water, dreaming, forgetful, almost at peace.

And it was here that she saw Mart Bladen. She had been listless, languid, visited by faint headaches, nausea, with a profound sensation of physical change and alteration. So far, she had concealed it, but she was sure that she was going to bear a child. She could not tell whether she was glad or sorry. The heat and closeness of the house oppressed her, and she had come out to find her favorite place by the creek, to crouch down there, and shiver, half-warm, half-chilled, and let her thoughts run away with the dancing water. But presently she heard steps in the underbrush and among the dry rattling leaves on the other side of the creek, heard them vaguely for the water made there a noisy little fall, but suddenly he had appeared on the other side, his gun in his hand, a game bag slung over his shoulder.

They looked at each other with no surprise. "I wondered when I was going to see you, Louellen," he said. "I reckon I'd better not come over there—yon side's his."

The easy laughter that had been his always before was gone. Now he was grave, questioning, older, and she knew that as much as she had changed he had also changed, going with her, her companion through separation.

"Ain't you going to speak to me?" he asked. But she could say nothing, for tears were in her throat. He stared at her intently. "I want to fill my eyes with you. I can't

get enough of looking at you. Louellen—you're not happy with him." It was not a question.

She shook her head. What was the use of lying?

"I've had time to think it out," he said. "You thought I didn't care enough about you, didn't you? You were proud. You felt kind of cheap, didn't you?"

So, he had read her truly, at last. "How'd you guess, Mart?" she faltered.

"I don't know. It come to me times when I was studying about it all, when it was too late. If I'd only a' known, I'd a' carried you off in front of the minister,—but I thought —oh, shucks, I got some pride, too, you know, and you'd turned against me so, I kept telling myself you wasn't worth it."

She could only look at him, dumbly, the tears rolling down her cheeks. He was blurred and unsteady through her tears.

"And I kept telling myself, after you and John Henry got promised that I didn't want you so much. That he'd touched you—and—and kissed you—that you wasn't the same to me after that. But it was all a lie. Look over here, Louellen—look at me. I've had my time to think it out, and I wouldn't care if you were John Henry's for a hundred years, I'd still want you. S'long's there's a piece of me alive, I'll want you. First I thought I'd sell and move away, but then I knew I couldn't. I wanted to be close to you, even when it was like this. And if you ever want anything, or need anything, or there's any reason—I'll be right there, and you only need send me word. No other woman's coming into my house. I got things all twisted once, but I shan't twice. I've thought it out. I won't change. I'm glad you're not happy with him, but I knew you wasn't going to be. 'Twasn't possible—you belong by rights to me."

He shouldered his gun. "I been wanting to say this to you, but I didn't reckon on its falling out so's I could, for maybe a long time. I can't help being glad you're not happy

with him, Louellen. And don't you forget. I'm near to you all the time, and always will be."

Her tears stopped as he disappeared, and a serene warmth pervaded her. He had lifted her out of the muck where she had fallen, he had given her a place apart with him. She harked back to her mother's half-forgotten words, "A place in her feelings where things can't drive in on her so hard." Mart had given her that, and he would be there with her, always. It was strength, it was shelter, it was refuge inviolate.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"LOUELLEN'S settled down," thought Jane West comfortingly. "I guess it's because of the baby coming. I was right worried about her at first." Now that worry was lost in the excitement of looking forward to her first grandchild.

It would, of course, be a boy. John Henry had his heart set on a boy. To reproduce his kind was the only fit tribute to his egotism.

"Upon my word, you might think, to hear him go on, that he was going to have it himself," asserted Aunt Lena, her maiden soul moved to protest at this apparent slighting of the privilege of her sex. At family prayers he made long and urgent petition for the approaching child, with an openness of allusion that put Aunt Lena in a state of blushes and painful embarrassment. She had long ago deferred her going back to York State indefinitely. She wanted to stay, and she knew Louellen wanted her. Her crochet hook and knitting needles flew as never before on bootees, sacques, cradle blankets. She developed a passion for fine hemstitching, scalloping. "Little teenty weenty things," she said, reveling. "Sleeves no bigger'n my thumb. It's right down cunning to make 'em."

Louellen smiled at her delight. Louellen had learned to smile again, not the still ironic smile of her first months of marriage, not her old girlish spontaneous smile, but a smile of far-away, remote places, where she could look at the world across unattainable distances and be amused by the futility of it.

She had not ceased to find ways to thwart John Henry. Doctor Tithelow was her ally there. The doctor, alert to all knotted situations, had asked her at his first visit to

him, bluntly: "Do you want me to tell your husband to sleep in another room?"

"Oh, will you?" she cried, with quick intensity.

And Doctor Tithelow had done it, with a spice of cheerful malice, adding a rough plain admonition. But it was Louellen who moved from the connubial four-poster to a small room down the hall, a small room with a narrow white bed, almost like her bed at home. She felt secure there and she reveled in the luxury of its privacy. It was sheer rapture not to feel her husband's hot grasp, nor later, to lie awake beside him, hating him for his heavy satiated sleep, hating her own body that it should be desirable. It was intensified rapture that her absence from his side irked and irritated him so.

She thought very little about the coming child, it had no reality for her. She was two people,—a woman who lived in a practical plain round of accustomed things, accomplishing mechanically, in word and deed, all that was required of her. The other was a flitting spirit, absorbed in a fantastic make-believe that had in it no gleam of truth, nor hope of realization. She would not, consciously, imagine herself the wife of Mart Bladen, but his face and his words at that meeting by the creek side constantly preoccupied her and kept her quiet in her new discomforts and nervous stresses, increased her lassitudes. Not that she wanted to see him again, or made any effort to do so—it was the custom of the time that women who are to bear children should seclude themselves as if it was a shameful business instead of a normal, desirable state—but just the memory of that one sight of him, and his understanding, and the love and patience in his voice—as different from that Mart Bladen of six months ago as Louellen Hyde was different from Louellen West—just these were enough to gild her days. And then, there was that twinkling light, a living spark of remembrance through the night. She could lie in her little narrow white bed and see it shining for her. It occurred to her how furious, how filled with poison spleen

John Henry would be if he knew that the mother of his desired son-to-be watched for Mart Bladen's light from her bed.

John Henry had apparently decided to forget that Mart was ever his rival and had resumed an unintimate but neighborly attitude, based on an occasional lending or borrowing of implements or tools, a prompt hail of greeting. There could never be any real friendliness between the two; they were too diverse. But John Henry did not hate Mart as Amos West did. Instead, it rather tickled him to say that Mart was his own worst enemy, and feel superior to him, stick out a smiling scornful lip at his reputed follies. John Henry was secure in his gratified egotism. He had got the woman he wanted and broken her to him. He was prospering. He stood well in the community. If he pinched pennies in a bargain he did not pinch them when the plate was passed in church, for he was jealous of his reputation there. He enjoyed his religion, and wanted to be looked up to in the congregation. A strong hell-and-damnation doctrine suited him, because he was so sure of his own worth. He liked to give his experience in class-meeting, to pray in the prayer meetings, and he looked forward to being Sunday School superintendent when the present incumbent, doddering old Henry Bishop, gave up that post. Where some men seek political preferment, his ambition was prominence in the church. When he was appointed a lay delegate to the annual conference, he swelled with pride, and would not have missed going for anything imaginable, though it was very near the time for his child to be born, and Jane West plainly told him that she thought he should stay at home.

"Let him go, Ma; don't say a word," said Louellen. "I'd rather he was away, to tell you the truth."

"Men ain't much help round the house at such a time," said Jane West, "but—s'long as it's the first— Still, if you feel that way—" She ignored the deeper issue of why Louellen should feel that way.

Jane West had come to stay with her daughter through her ordeal. Her principal duty, she found, was not to cheer and comfort and encourage Louellen, who was calm almost to indifference, but to use the same arts on Aunt Lena, who, now that the event was so near, had developed an acute apprehension which expressed itself in weeping and doleful prophecies. She sobbed over the dishpan and salted the bread with tears, and her conversation was of nothing but those who had died in childbirth, or brought forth children who were hideously marked. Jane West made short shrift of all this, and Aunt Lena brightened visibly under her vigorous treatment.

"What'd you let her stay on for anyway?" asked Jane West, wonderingly, of Louellen in confidence. "She'd drive me wild."

"I don't listen to her," said Louellen.

"You don't listen to much of anything, seems to me," said her mother. "I don't like it, you to be so limp and lack-a-daisy. But I'm thankful enough that you ain't scared. Some women take on so."

"I'm not scared," said Louellen. She was lying on the lounge in the sitting room, wrapped in a dark shawl that made her eyes, ringed with purplish circles, unnaturally dark and shadowy. She turned her head and looked full at her mother. It seemed to her that the time had come to speak out. "I don't care whether I live or die, or whether the child lives or dies," she said, clearly, coldly.

"My soul, Louellen, you mustn't say things like that. It's a sin," exclaimed Jane West, distressed and shocked.

"Then it's a sin to speak the truth," said Louellen. Her shadowed eyes stared at her mother, seemed to dare her to come into the open and face the wrongness of her marriage with her. Jane West's eyes fell before them. She could not take that dare.

"You're just wrought up and not in a natural state," she said. "I'm going to get you a cup of tea. Doc Tithelow said you might have tea, didn't he?"

"Oh yes, he said I might have tea."

"She ain't settled down at all," ran the burthen of Jane West's troubled thoughts, as she busied herself with the hot water and teapot. "It's all seething round inside her, just the same. Oh, my goodness—I wish—" but she would not go on with what she wished. Louellen was a wife and would soon be a mother. She must submit to the inevitable lot of womankind. After the baby came, reflected Jane West, she'd feel differently.

The baby did not arrive until John Henry, very important and conversational, had been back from conference two days. It was not an easy birth. For twenty hours Doctor Tithelow did not stir from Louellen's bedside, and when it was over he was as exhausted as she. Aunt Maria Wheeler, his colored nurse for baby cases, who had been summoned a little before him, opened the door of the spare room and motioned him into it.

"You lay down a spell," she said. "Us women kin tek care of 'er now. I gwine wash en dress de chile, whilst she's drapped off to sleep."

"Go down and tell him he's got a daughter," said Doctor Tithelow, wearily, nodding downstairs where he knew John Henry waited. "I believe I will take an hour's rest. I'm tuckered out. Don't forget to call me."

So it was from the lips of Aunt Maria that John Henry learned of his disappointment. He had counted so confidently on a son that at first he was incredulous.

"I'm going up and see the Doctor," he declared sharply. But Aunt Maria, a stately creature, barred the way.

"You ain' got good sense, man," she said scornfully. "Doc Tithelow cain' change dat baby fum er gal to er boy. Beside, he need his res'. Whilst you been settin' down heah taken yo' ease, he been er strivin' en er strugglin' to bring dat chile inter de worl' widout killin' off yo' po' li'l wife. Ha'd a birth ez I yever see."

She retired with the majesty of an offended queen. There was nothing left for John Henry to do but to pace about

and tell Aunt Lena to shut up crying. A shrill strange wail from above where Aunt Maria was washing and dressing the new-born little girl was evidence that Louellen had succeeded in thwarting him once more. After a while it was still, so he ventured out into the hall and mounted the stairs. Louellen had fallen into heavy sleep and her mother was sitting beside her. John Henry tiptoed in.

"How is she?" he whispered anxiously, to Jane West.

"All right now, I reckon, but it was terrible." Her stout face was aged in lines of acute vicarious suffering; she looked withered and drawn and old. "It was worse than having one of my own," she went on. "You seen the baby?"

Louellen stirred and opened weary sleep-drugged eyes, looked at her husband. Seeing her awake, he came further into the room, took hold of her hand.

"Well, Louellen," he said. "How you feeling? Right hard time you had, I expect. And it's only a girl after all. Maybe we'll have better luck next time."

"Ain't you got any decency?" Jane West flung at him in outrage. "Talking like that! You better go downstairs again. Only a girl! And better luck next time! I don't know what to think of you."

Thus lashed for the second time within the hour by feminine anger John Henry retreated sourly. After he had gone Jane West stirred about the room a little, shaking with her rage. Louellen had not spoken. At last her mother could not bear it. She advanced again to the bedside. "Is that what he's like?" she asked, the words coming breathlessly.

Louellen nodded weakly from among her pillows.

Jane West dropped down into her chair and put her hands over her face. "I'll never forgive myself," she said.

Presently she felt Louellen's fluttering tremulous touch upon her shoulder. "Don't," she said. "I've stopped minding—so much. Crying don't help. I reckon I've cried all the tears in the world already."

There were great vistas of unspoken understanding and

sympathy about them, and withal, submission. Short of extreme physical abuse no respectable woman left her husband. A marriage meant, without evasion, unmitigated union until death. This they knew. Louellen must go on. But now her mother would go on with her.

"I only kind of half-suspicioned," said Jane West, at last. "I never really got at the truth of him. My poor Louellen—my child."

It was all the excuse she had to offer. She thought over it a while, looking absently out of the window. Louellen, too worn, too dragged to answer, had again fallen asleep. Dusk had dropped down, a nebula of softest blue, linking the sky and the earth into an uncertain world of beauty. Far away, through this impalpable veil of enchanted distance and darkness, shone the light from Mart Bladen's window, and Jane West, gazing, saw it, and knew its source.

"My soul,—I wish't she'd've married Mart," she said aloud, and glanced about her with instant guilt that such a sentiment, so subversive to all propriety and morals, should have crossed her lips. Louellen stirred in her bed, turned, still asleep, a little toward the window. Perhaps she dreamed her mother's words true.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In the likeness, soon evident, of his first born to him, John Henry Hyde found a certain consolation for the disappointment of her sex. Little Virginia—immediately Virgie—was a thin brown restless baby, a miniature replica of her father, even to the bend of her diminutive nose. "She's her father over again," that rather meaningless set form of local compliment became in this case quite true. And there was no question but what she had his will. She wanted what she wanted when she wanted it, and if it did not at once appear, she would, according to Aunt Lena, "yell the roof off." Aunt Lena's enthusiasm for children waned perceptibly in the moments of little Virgie's infantile passions.

Louellen gathered her strength slowly. The child was a care, but she was faithful to it. If she felt no overflow of maternal affection for it, she was none the less a patient and painstaking mother, following out all of Doctor Tithelow's directions for the baby far more carefully than she did those commands he laid on her about herself. He complained bitterly of this. "You'll give me a black eye round about, if you don't mind what I say," he grumbled. "I tell you you mustn't try to do heavy housework. Now you be sensible, and don't let me catch you sweeping again till I tell you you can."

Slowly she grew stronger, more herself. Yet with a difference. She had her mother now for ally and support, and this was a steady help to her. Jane West drove to the Hyde farm whenever she could, sat with her daughter through long days of comfortable talk, tendance on the baby, sewing, all bound into companionship. Or she would have Louellen come and bring the baby home with her, and she and Louellen would watch Annie's raptures over

the child, laughing to it, teasing it, playing with it, blowing kisses into its soft little neck with absurd pleasure in her irresponsibility. At such times Louellen and her mother would read each other's minds, each thankful that Annie was light-hearted, untouched.

Miss Becca Simpson came, to dangle glittering fascinating beads before the baby and to remark that she did think 'twas a pity the little thing had to look so like her Pa, but that maybe she'd grow out of it. John Henry, she further remarked, couldn't set up as a beauty, even if he was a pillar in the church.

Came also Rena Massey, to confide that she and Dan were going to be married at Christmas. In tittering sly whispers she begged Louellen to tell her something about marriage in its more personal aspects, and was startled and offended by Louellen's shuddering silence. But presently she was chattering away about her silk dresses—she was to have three—her ruffled petticoats, her kid gloves, the brooch, clasped hands of coral on a gold mount, that Dan had given her. Of course they would have to live at home with her folks, at first, Rena conceded, but that would save her having to do housework. She didn't want a house unless they could have a big one, with Brussels carpets and crystal chandeliers, and plush furniture, and gilt framed pierglasses. She spoke as if such a house was already quite within her grasp. She could even now see her own resplendent reflection in the pierglasses.

Three months after little Virgie had wept her way into the world Louellen knew that she was to have another child. At first she was utterly dismayed, the rigors of Virgie's birth being fresh in her memory. Then she realized that it offered her again the inestimable privilege of her little isolated room, her untroubled sleep. Deliberately she affected weakness and illness that she did not feel, requiring the presence of Doctor Tithelow. He came, and divined her need, as before. His second admonition to John Henry was tinged with professional satire. He en-

joyed the discomfiture of the other man's desire, his anger at its denial.

"You shouldn't have married a woman who isn't strong," Doctor Tithelow told him, finally. "You'll kill your wife. Some one of these days I'm going to publish broadcast over the county the men I know who're not fit to be married." He said it with insolence, and with authority. He had divined the essential coward in John Henry's nature, and his hypocrisy, also the passionate need of the man to stand well in the eyes of the public. It amused him to see dark angry blood creep up to John Henry's cheekbones, to know that he would not risk open resentment.

Coming away from the Hyde farm, he stopped in to see Mart Bladen. The disgust of the interview was still with him, and he voiced a bit of it to Mart.

"I don't like your neighbor here," he said briefly.

"I'm none so fond of him myself," answered Mart. "But he keeps his fences up and don't bother me any. What's he been up to now?"

"He's a hog,—no, that's a libel on a decent worthy animal. What beats me is how a fine-grained nice girl like Louellen West ever came to marry him. I'd have thought the mere look of the man would have been enough."

"Say," demanded Mart, bluntly, "has John Henry been abusing Louellen?"

"He hasn't beat her, if that's what you mean."

"What do *you* mean?"

Doctor Tithelow considered. He was notoriously close-mouthed concerning his patients. That was part of his power over them. "I reckon I said too much," he admitted at last frankly. He changed the subject. "How comes you don't get married?" he asked.

"None of the girls will have me."

"You keep on drinking and rousting around and you won't be fit for any girl to have. But I will admit you've let up a little here lately."

Mark made a gesture of impatience, and harked back to

their former topic as if they had not left it. "Of course I knew Louellen wasn't going to be contented with him,—but I didn't count on his being mean to her. I understand they've got a child. I saw Louellen once with it, in the buggy with her mother."

Doctor Tithelow grunted. "They've got one, going to have another. Seems John Henry's set on having a son. The first was a girl." He got up and lumbered down to his buggy. "I hope there'll come a time," he said vehemently, "when women'll be something to men besides reproductive animals. God, when I see what the women in this community put up with, makes me feel that all this holler Susan B. Anthony and that Stanton female's putting up for women's rights might have something to it."

He left Mart sunk in deep depression, groping. A strange fixed constancy toward Louellen possessed him. He made no effort to see her, or to meet her; there would be danger for both of them in that. But he wanted to be near her. He had told her he would always wait for her, wait for the chance of her needing him, and he was bound to do it. He kept a place apart for her in his thoughts, in his heart, even as she did for him. Otherwise his life had gone on in its simplicity and aimlessness, as always. There was the land to be farmed, the stock to be bred and reared. In the spring and fall, hunting. Always he had his horses, his dogs, and his friends, but from the more robust antics of the Kemps he had withdrawn. The feeling that they were childishly not worth while had persisted. Instead he and Jere Willis, who had long ago forgiven and forgotten his beating, Ches Layton, Haney Griffith and one or two others had formed a social group devoted to riding and cards, with an occasional drinking bout and cocking main, in which diversions they were occasionally joined by Doctor Tithelow, or Luther Gadd, or Clint Cook, town bloods, and older men. So his days came and went in a slow peaceful wash of time that quieted the ache of his loss of Louellen. That sore was healed over, but not cured.

Doctor Tithelow had torn open the covering tissue, left the wound bare and raw. His imagination made Louellen a dove in John Henry's talons. The outrage of possession by another of the woman he loved, their intimacy, brought a more poignant, more unbearable pain than utter loss. It was a constant twist of the knife, salt rubbed on raw flesh.

"Yes—but what you going to do?" he asked himself. There seemed no answer adequate to his need. He shook his head impatiently. He could feel, he could act, but to moralize or reflect was difficult. If there was no way out,—why, then, there was no way out. He would have to stand it. He would have to wait. He was strangely sure that it was all just a matter of waiting. And he was dimly aware that he was incapable of shaping events to suit his will, that he had never been able to change and remold his fate. He was too close to the earth, too much a part of the soil to do that. He must yield and accept, drawn on or hindered by unescapable destiny.

He looked about his bare and quiet house. Far back in the kitchen he could hear the shuffle and clack of Ephum and Sally in desultory talk and still more desultory labor. His house was bare, like his heart, like his life. Unskilled, untutored in perception or knowledge of himself, he felt this bareness and the strangeness, the wrong that a man with his strong straight body, his youth, should not reproduce his kind. He bred his sound cattle, and increased his stock healthily. Silly's litter of puppies which she fawned over and brought proudly to his feet, barking and growling in maternal excitement; the wobbling tilt of newborn colts, ridiculous in proportion, awkward, but somehow babyish and appealing; ugly little helpless lambs, and fawn-eyed calves with button horns,—year by year all this life renewed itself, as normally, as naturally as the corn and wheat of his fields grew to maturity, and ripened their fertile kernels. Only the master of the cattle, of the land, remained alone.

But he would not change. Over there, in that house

which he could see, set deep, like his own, in clustering trees, Louellen might be the wife of John Henry Hyde and bear his children. Even so, those stubborn facts brought him no wish for any other woman. His loneliness was the jewel of his constancy; if he could not drink clear water, he would go thirsty. Della Layton . . . he frowned, bewildered. A girl oughtn't to be so hard after a man who'd showed her that he didn't want her. Della was persistent with all the rigor of a spoiled child. Well . . . it wouldn't do her any good. Some men might find themselves whisked into matrimony by a too-eager woman, but not Mart.

"If she hadn't been so darned anxious I'd have liked her more," he thought. "She ought to have more sense. Even Ches hints sometimes. If she was my sister I'd give her a good spanking and shut her up, once and for all." He had no gallant compunctions against such conclusions. It was the part of the man to pursue, the woman to await pursuit, and not to assist at her own capture. If she was too willing she inevitably spoiled her market.

There was that within him which found it curiously satisfying and good to live with denial, and with sorrow. Below his roistering, his gayety, his taste for pleasure, there was a strain of melancholy, of irony, inherited, perhaps, from that first Bladen of the merry heart, who had possessed, nevertheless, sufficient purpose to win his way up from the servants' class and establish a sound if modest fortune in a new world. As he worked out his future against hard material conditions and took amiable pride in his success, so Mart, generations away, must hold his own mischance of happiness to steady and enlarge him, finding himself steadfast and sure, anchored where before he had drifted.

The gossips of the county, when Mart Bladen's name was up for comment, had the truth of it when they said: "He never got over Louellen West throwing him over."

Invariably they added: "Not that he shows it any, goodness knows. He's a case—Mart Bladen."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Louellen Hyde's second child was a son, puny, fretful, scrawny. A delicate child, hard to keep alive, but instantly the apple of John Henry's eye. He was named for his father, and the week after his christening was marked to Louellen by her first open quarrel with her husband.

It was about money. John Henry's avaricious tendencies had grown apace. The cattle, the driving horse, that had been part of Louellen's marriage portion, had long since been appropriated to his own profit. He had represented to her that he would "take care of the money" for her and her faint demurrer had gone past him unheard. She had not appealed to her father. In any matter such as this Amos West accepted his son-in-law's view as just and right. Did he not take care, and, to do him justice, with the utmost scrupulosity, of Jane West's personal moneys, giving her due account, and making it possible for her to use it at any time she wished? Narrow and dominating Amos West might be, but his palms had no itch, and he was utterly honest. Nor was he suspicious of the honesty of others. John Henry had calculated on that. He had also calculated on the fact that Amos West profoundly believed women to have no judgment where matters of business were concerned, despite the daily evidence to the contrary he had from his wife. What he observed in Jane did not change his long accepted generalization as to the weakness of the feminine intellect, the incapacity of the sex to think for themselves, their inferiority in all things, to men.

But now the mortgage which he had given Louellen had fallen due. John Henry apprised her of it. He was sitting poring over the precious notes and papers of his solid cherry desk, key to which never left his pocket.

"That mortgage of yours'll be due next month," he said. "I think Kelly'll be ready to pay. I'll see him when I go to town come Saturday, and make arrangements to bank the money till I can pick up another just as good, or hear of somebody who wants to borrow."

Louellen had been trying to coax the fretting baby to sleep. Her bright color had changed to a yellowish pallor, token of anemia and exhaustion. Rain had kept John Henry in the house all day and his presence had been wearisome. He thought, and said, that Louellen and Aunt Lena, between them, ought to be able to keep the children quiet and good, but Virgie was teething and feverish, and "restless as a puppy," as Aunt Lena remarked, after an hour's efforts to amuse and quiet had been in vain. But now she had unwillingly dropped into slumber, and if the baby could also be lured therein, there would be a short eminently desirable peace.

"Won't I have to bank the money?" asked Louellen, only half listening, "Or will it do if I just give you my book?" She had saved a little from her dearly won egg and butter surplus, and contrary to John Henry's advice had put it in the Manor bank under her own name. Her bank book was a red rag to him.

"I'll bank it in my own account," he answered shortly, "and invest it again soon's I get a chance."

She had never before gainsaid him directly, but now she felt a flash of her old time temper. "Then I won't sign the release papers, nor the receipt," she said. "Not unless that money's paid right into my own hands, and I can put it into my own account and invest it myself."

"What d'you know about investing?" he said, showing his teeth in that ugly smile she hated.

"Maybe nothing, but I know what's mine. You've never made any accounting of what you got for my cattle, either."

He was genuinely astonished. Louellen in open revolt was something unexpected, amazing.

"What's got into you?" he asked peevishly. "I'll give

you an accounting in my own good time. And as for your not signing the receipt—we'll see about that."

"Yes, we will," she declared hardily.

Their glances were knives. "You can't act like this to me," he declared harshly. "I don't know why you should manifest such an evil and un-Christian spirit, all of a sudden."

It was his prayermeeting twang, and it added to her flame. "Maybe I feel evil and un-Christian," she declared. "And I tell you this: if you don't hand me over that mortgage money soon's you get it, I'll go right to Pa and Ma, and tell them. I'll tell a few more people on the way, too. I'd just as soon everybody'd know what kind you are, trying to use your wife's money as if it was your own. As if you hadn't plenty and more than plenty! People'd like to hear you give your experience in class-meeting when they knew you'd banked my mortgage money for yourself." She was amazed at the facility with which she found words, the ease with which she defied her tyrant, now that she had begun it. The sight of this unctuous sleek man, with his increased flesh, his ruddy color, his health and strength, contrasted with her own sickly bedraggle-ment urged her to express her pent-up resentment.

His color flamed higher as he listened, he darkened and swelled in offended dignity. Yet he knew that she had struck his weak joint. He could not bear to be laughed at or belittled. Nothing must be said of him except what was of good report, praise, compliment. To be thrown into the backwash of idle tittle-tattle was unbearable to him, he winced away from the faintest prospect of it.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said, but she detected the undercurrent of uncertainty, uneasiness. "Anybody'd think you distrusted me."

Her emotion made her a woman strengthened, renewed. She put the child, still crying, down into his cradle and stood over it. "Distrust you!" she cried, and the sound of her voice rang clear and almost mirthful. "Distrust

you! I hate you! I despise you! I loathe and detest you—body and soul. What do you make of that, John Henry?"

John Henry could make nothing at all of it. "If you felt thataway," he said, "what'd you marry me for?"

"I'd like to know myself," said Louellen, bitterly. "If I'd known you as I know you now I'd never've done it."

John Henry chose to be superior, authoritative, disregarding. "You mustn't talk so. It's wild and foolish. It's sacrilegious, too. Saint Paul says the woman is not to usurp authority over the man. A man's got to be head of his household—and I intend to be."

Louellen tossed her arms. "Saint Paul! My soul, Saint Paul! I wonder what he'd have said to you. You're going to be head of your household, are you? All right, that don't change anything. I've stood too much—and too long. And this mortgage money—my money—if you try to put that into your pocket same's you have the cattle, I'll make you smart for it. For all Pa thinks you're so godly he'd never countenance that."

He got up and stalked out, saving his face. "I'll talk to you when you're in your right mind. You try to get yourself under control. I won't stand much of this kind of goings on."

Presently she heard him out in the woodhouse, sawing furiously. Aunt Lena crept in from the kitchen. "What were you and him having such a towse about?" she asked tremulously. "I was scared to come in."

Louellen told her. "And he needn't think he's heard the last of it, either. I'll have that money, or I'll do as I said."

Aunt Lena shook her head pityingly. "You don't know John Henry when he gets his dander up. He'll manage to get round it somehow. He's the kind that never forgets—anything—and keeps right on worrying and gnawing till he has his way. It's better to let him have it in the first place and save bad feeling."

"Seems to me," countered Louellen, "we're too intent

on saving John Henry's feelings. Let's save our own a while."

But Aunt Lena was not to be reasoned with. "You'll see. It don't pay."

And the malevolent outraged whine of John Henry's saw echoed the sentiment.

Louellen felt her own enthusiasm ebbing. She suddenly realized that she had spent herself in that fiery interview, that she ached with weariness, that her flesh fairly trembled on her bones in despairing fatigue. She sat down by her child's cradle and rocked it mechanically. Even so, she could not be sorry. "President Lincoln ought to've signed a 'mancipation proclamation for white women as well as nigger men," she said to Aunt Lena. The timid old maid compressed into her hopeless answer a lifetime of cynic observation. "S'far as I ever see, there's no 'mancipation for white women from white men. Except death. That's why I stayed single."

The other hardly heard her. She was wondering if John Henry would yield, and if he did, what payment he would exact for his yielding. She wondered if she would have the courage, in the last stress, to go home and appeal to her father and mother. Why had she started all this pother about the mortgage money? What did it matter? What good was money to her, and why should she want it?

"If I could only see my way clear to—to anything," she thought. "But whichever way I start it don't seem worth while. It all comes back to living with him. If I could only get away! If I could only get away! If I could only make it so that he'd never want me back!"

"I'll start the fire up and put the kettle on, Aunt Lena," she said. "You sit here and rock Buddy. I feel's if a little stirring round would do me good. When I get supper going I'll call you to set the table."

Her immaculate kitchen soothed her. The floor was scoured white, and so was the table top. The tins were mirrors, her stove a friendly black-shining ogre, waiting

to be fed the sticks of pine and oak piled in the green painted wood-box. A pot of oxalis bloomed on the windowsill, bright pink flowers, little impudent tossed-about bells of color among the trefoil leaves and crisp translucent stems. Louellen raked out the few living coals in the ashes of the stove, coaxed them with crumpled paper and some scraps of kindling, and the flame leaped up, responsive to her craft. She piled in the wood, filled the kettle and set it in place. She would make hot biscuits for supper—John Henry did not like the neighborhood custom of fresh hot bread with each meal. She would open a jar of strawberry preserves—John Henry preferred cherry. She would have tea and not coffee—John Henry did not drink tea. While she was about it she would cream instead of fry the potatoes, for he considered frying the only method of rendering potatoes palatable. She would, she decided, in every way make him see that it was to be open war.

"Aunt Lena'll pass away when she sees the table," she told the steaming tea kettle. But she was so tired. She leaned a moment against the window frame, looking out at the rain. She did not want to fight and quarrel and bicker. Always it brought with it a sense of inevitable personal degradation. She was less herself, and more a shrew, a scold, each time it happened. Again she had the strong impulse to change and alter her life with a violent irrevocable gesture. Once she had done it, disastrously, in her marriage with John Henry. Now, to escape from that marriage, why should she not do it again? Nothing, nothing could be worse than this. She was sick, sore, wasted in body and soul. And endless years of it stretched before her.

John Henry came to supper like a malicious thundercloud. Nor did the shadow lift when he saw a meal in direct perversion of his explicit taste. But Louellen ate with a relish, for the first time in weeks. She waited for his temper to lash out at her, but it had not reached that stage. It was still, brooding, sullen.

They were only half way through the gloomy meal when there came a sound of buggy wheels in the wide yard, then steps and a heavy pounding on the door. Hance Wright, his youthful face drawn into lines of distress, stood there.

"Louellen," he stammered, "I come to get you—your Pa's had a stroke. I dropped in to see Annie, and found it'd just happened, and so I sent Edward for Doc Tithelow and come on over here to get you and John Henry. He's—well, I'm afraid he's right bad off."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Amos West rallied a little, regaining for a week a little movement of his limbs and his speech, thickened and almost inarticulate. A second stroke deprived him of this, and his long lean old body, weatherbeaten and toil-worn, lay wholly inert, unresponsive to his imperious will. Only his eyes stayed alive, resigned, patient. At the end of three weeks he lapsed into coma, and presently died, without regaining consciousness.

Under this sudden unexpected bereavement Jane West crumpled and broke, grieving with a passion that brought rebuke from Brother Truitt, who felt that she showed a lack of proper Christian resignation. She did not hear him. It was strange and pitiful to see this sturdy, calm woman beset with emotion so devastating. She aged a decade overnight; her resolution and her strength were gone.

She wept to her daughters. "I can't understand it—I can't understand it! The best man that ever lived—and the kindest heart. Honest as the day he was. No woman ever had a better husband,—there wasn't any reason why he should be taken and me left. He'd ought to've lived twenty years more. Thirty years we've lived together, and now to have him go!"

Without reserve she poured out all that was in her heart, and made no effort to rouse herself into any practical consideration of the funeral. Let others care for that. Her sisters came, and all the circle of kin that had not gathered since Louellen's wedding, but Jane West did not see them, did not realize them. Docilely she did as they told her, put on the heavy crêpe, the stifling black veil that they fitted to her, but she answered their sympathetic questions at random, and her eyes were vacant.

"Terrible the way Jane's taking on. I wouldn't have thought she'd give way like this," they told each other.

Another universal comment was: "I don't know what she'd've done without John Henry."

For John Henry was in his rightful element. He managed the obsequies, even arranging who should go in the first carriages without causing any heart-burnings or unpleasantness, he displayed just the proper feeling without being too overcome to attend to all the details of the dreary business. He could descant feelingly to a faraway cousin of the Christian virtues of the deceased, and at the same time indicate to the cousin the place most convenient to stable his horse. It was strongly felt throughout the family that John Henry had acquitted himself well in his first chance to show his abilities.

When the will was opened it was found that all Amos West's property was left to his wife for her lifetime, and that she was sole executrix without bond. In sad bewilderment she could only turn to John Henry. "I don't know what to do," she confessed, for the first time in her life.

So again John Henry became very active. It seemed the best plan that the farm should be rented and that Annie and her mother should take a house in Manor and live there together. Amos West had not neglected to lay up treasures on earth as well as in heaven, and his widow was well off. Not that she cared. She sat in her accustomed chair, and plaited her black skirts between weary idle fingers, giving only half attention to the things John Henry told her. She signed the papers he brought her without question. Now and then he required the signatures of Annie and Louellen. He held frequent consultations with Judge Markwood, and astonished that easy-going gentleman by his sharp comprehension of the law.

In a little less than two months from the day when Amos West fell stricken at his kitchen door, his widow and daughter were placed in a town dwelling, and the farmstead that

had been his father's was in the hands of a capable renter. His going had changed and disorganized all the immediate life about him.

During all this time Louellen had stayed with her mother. Jane West wanted her, and John Henry had not dissented. So Aunt Lena kept little Virgie, and Louellen and her baby lived in the old home. In spite of the grief she felt for her father, and the distress at her mother's suffering and failure, it was a respite for Louellen. She grew stronger, her color brightened, a thread of energy and vitality crept through her languor. But now that her mother and Annie were in their new home—where poor Jane West moved listlessly and silently about, chilled by its strangeness and loneliness—there was no further excuse for her to stay.

Seen through the lens of her mother's grief Amos West became a different person to Louellen. Nothing of his narrowness, nothing of his sternness, stayed in her memory, only his solid goodness, his devotion, his closeness of spirit to her mother. In the breaking of this marriage she saw what marriage might be. This was what a man might mean to a woman, if they loved each other. Her mother's tears for her loss washed clear for Louellen the dimensions of her own bondage.

"If it was John Henry who'd died," she thought, "how glad I'd've been. Oh, this can't go on—it can't. I can't bear it."

In an intense depression she got into the buggy to go home.

"You've stayed away too long," said John Henry, gathering up the reins. "Man and wife shouldn't be separated for no such length of time. You go upstairs as soon as we get home. It'll be like getting married all over again."

The sickening first days of her marriage rose before her evilly. She longed to tell him she was never going to live with him again, but she shrank from the wrangle that would follow. He was just a beast. She thought of the quarrel they had had on the day when she had been called

to her father, and a question came into her mind. She asked it involuntarily.

"What'd you do with that mortgage of mine?" she asked. "It passed out of my mind. You didn't ask me for my bankbook."

He smiled, his arrogant, greedy smile. "I did what I said I was going to do. I got the money and banked it."

"But—but—I never signed—" She tried to puzzle it out.

"Oh, yes, you did. You thought you was signing something about your father's estate and you never so much as looked at 'em." He was laughing now, satisfied with his trick. "I guess that'll teach you not to be so high-headed. You been getting out of hand completely here lately. You might's well und'stand you can't get away with any smartness with me. I'm just as smart as you are, and maybe a little bit smarter."

He waited calmly for her to say something, but she could not speak. She was choked, stifled with the ignominy of it. "And you can't run to your Pa now and play baby, either," he added, clinching his triumph.

So he had counted on that. He had seen in her father's death this cowardly advantage to himself. Now she would have no support, no one to turn to for help or protection. Her broken mother . . . not the Jane West of old. It would be little use to appeal to her even if she would have the heartlessness to thrust further trouble on her. Now she was really alone. She must fight for herself, or she must submit wholly . . . for always. Her resolution crystallized.

"I'm not going upstairs when we get home," she said softly. "I've had it in mind not ever to live with you again, because I despise you so. Now I've made up my mind. I'm not going to. If you lay hands on me, I'll fight. No—it won't be—exactly as if we were getting married all over again. . . . "

"We'll see," he said. "You need—discipline."

She did not answer. They drove on in combative silence through the shimmer and shine of the earliest spring sunshine, an iridescent promise, a teasing prophecy which neither of them perceived or felt. The swelling buds of the swamp maples, the mere flicker and feather of green in the willows, the clustering of frail short-stemmed flowers—so eager to bloom, and yet so afraid of the lingering cold—under dead leaves, or in protected corners open to the South, the excited rush and babble of tiny spring freshets in the brooks, none of the generous enchantment of a world waiting for renewal could pierce through their dark animosity, their absorbed conflict.

As they drew near home her purpose hardened, her face set in grim stone. Her will did not waver. She would not . . . she would not. This was the end. There was nothing good, nothing decent, nothing even remotely livable, in him. He must have everything, strip her. She was to have no will, no self, no rights of her own and all of her resources were to be his property, existing merely for his use, at his will and pleasure. That mortgage money . . .

She understood why there are murderers.

And yet she had come only to a negative decision. There must be something more, positive assertion, ascendency.

At the house Aunt Lena came eagerly to meet them, and little Virgie, seeing her mother, set up a shout of joy.

"You don't really need me," laughed Louellen, "Aunt Lena takes better care of you than I do."

"The stay's done you good," said Aunt Lena, "and the baby too. My, he's grown. It's been lonesome without you. Is your Ma feeling better by this time? How I've thought of her!"

The two women sat gossiping, and presently John Henry came in. He hesitated for a moment, and then went on upstairs. Louellen did not look at him, only sat and continued her talk with Aunt Lena. Presently he called, "Louellen."

"Ask him what he wants, will you?" said Louellen wick-

edly, "I'm too lazy to go upstairs. And I expect we'd better be about getting supper."

Aunt Lena came back from the foot of the stairs shaking her head. "He couldn't find his everyday suit," she said, "and it was right under his nose. I told him. Aren't men ridic'lous?"

"Certainly are," agreed Louellen. "There now, Buddy, I'm going to put you into your crib. Look how plump his little hands are, Aunt Lena. Well, shall we get at supper?"

The kitchen and Aunt Lena were a sure refuge. Louellen was busy at the stove when John Henry stamped downstairs, and went out to the stables. She wanted to scream with laughter, to shout derision at him. There was a long butcher knife, thin bladed, sharp as a razor, lying on the kitchen table, and time and again her eyes lingered on it, her fingers itched for it. She caught herself back from this.

"I wonder if I'm going crazy," she thought.

She kept up a pretense of conversation with Aunt Lena during supper, and afterward lingered downstairs doing little things for the children. John Henry had said little. He had the air of one who bides his time but exacts full payment for waiting.

Quite early he yawned and went upstairs. Louellen could hear him padding about impatiently up there. Aunt Lena took Virgie off to bed in the downstairs room which she preferred to occupy in winter, because it was kept warm and cosy by the dining room fire.

Louellen hesitated, then picked up the sleeping boy, wrapped him in his blankets and slowly, with stealthy steps, went up the stairs. She crept down the hall, entered her little old room, shut and bolted the door, and leaned against it. She was disposing the baby in the bed, wrapping him more comfortably, when John Henry rattled at the knob. "What you doing in there?" he demanded.

Now that the actual moment of battle had arrived she was faint with the tumult in her heart.

"I'm going to stay in here," she managed to say.

She heard a suppressed exclamation, and then, without wasting words, John Henry shouldered the door with all his strength. It was strong oak, and did not give. He tried again—again. But the door stood firm. She could hear him breathing hard, in angry gulps.

Now he was still, and a moment later she heard him run down the hall, downstairs. In a flash of divination she knew that he was going out to the back shed where he kept his tool box. He would get something,—a chisel,—a bar,—and break the lock. Then . . .

She flung the door open and listened. He had stopped to light a lamp. Without knowing what she was doing, in a blind, senseless panic, she too ran downstairs, unlocked the front door, and fled out into the cold spring night.

She ran and ran, stopping only when she could not get her breath, when the sharp pain in her side stabbed her too violently to let her go on. When she had to rest, she listened for pursuit, but there was none. If he had tried to follow he had not found her track. And suddenly she knew that she had unconsciously run to Mart Bladen,—that his light she had marked so often from her window, was shining full and clear, and very near, before her.

CHAPTER TWENTY

He was in his room, half asleep, dozing over the local column of the Manor *Democrat,* when Spot and Silly, alert, warned him there was some one near. They did not bark, only stood to attention, their ruffs bristling, growling low in their throats. Now and then they looked up at Mart, questioningly, and edged over toward the door. They did not know whether this was an intruder or a guest. Any one who ran so breathlessly, so stumblingly . . .

"Mart," she cried huskily, "Mart—let me in—"

Her face white, her mouth weakened and panting, her gray eyes dilated to black, appeared at the low window. He ran to open it, to lift her over the sill. "For God's sake, Louellen, what's the matter?" he cried. "Anything wrong at your house—?"

She clung to him. "Put out the light," she said. "Put out the light. He might be coming after me."

In the quick darkness she held to him, leaning, dependent on him. "Who's coming after you?" he asked, puzzled. "There, don't shake so. Nothing's going to hurt you, nor nobody. I got you safe, honey. Tell me—what's the matter?"

"Mart," she whispered, "Mart—will you keep me here? Will you let me—live with you? Will you—take me, Mart?"

The sudden apparition of her had been startling, so bewildering, so amazing that he could not feel its reality. Yet here she was, shaken, clinging, her soft tangled hair against his cheek, her hands holding to him with desperate need. Beautiful and dear—a dream come true. He could only hold her tighter, aching with his re-awakened love and need of her.

"What do you mean, honey?" he whispered. "What do

you mean? Did you run away from John Henry? What's he done to you? Let me go—I'll settle with him."

"No—no. I only want to stay here with you. I want to belong to you. I want it to be so—so I can never go back. I *won't* ever go back. I don't care what happens—I'm going to stay here with you, always. Mart—Mart—when I saw your light in the window—I knew—I've watched that light so often, night after night, till it seemed like you were talking to me—"

"You watched my light? If I'd known—"

"Mart, I love you—I love you." She would say it now, turning her head to press her lips against his shoulder, imploring forgiveness and response.

"I've never loved anybody but you," he said. "Louellen—my girl—it's been so long—" His famished love clamored for her. He forgot the strangeness of her coming, the utter madness of it, everything, in the darkness, and her surrender, her urgency. She was here, and she was his. So long denied, so long despaired of.

"I'll never let you go."

"I'll never go."

"I'll hold you 'gainst the world and all, Louellen. I'll take you away—"

"I only want to be with you. I don't care about anything else."

"I love you—nobody ever loved a woman so much."

"Keep me here."

"Always."

"I belong to you—I belong to you, Mart."

"Do you mean that?"

"You know it. Why should I come if I didn't?"

True—why should she have come? Mart knew, as well as she, the immense, the overwhelming significance of her coming, the gulf of shame she had willingly drowned herself in, when this should be known. But neither of them thought of that at this moment. They were too aware of each other, too wrapped in the ecstasy of their embrace.

Sighingly, longingly, they kissed, sadness and rapture, infinite regret, infinite unrest, but an irrevocable pledge.

"Long ago I wanted you to kiss me—you remember?"

"I wanted to. I was ashamed to. I'm not ashamed of anything now. I want you so. I'll never go away from you."

They had turned back the weary months, blotted them out. They could never be separated again. He could not deny himself, nor her. In the darkness there was nothing but themselves, their demanding love, so long refused and hidden. Now, in its hour of splendor, it became a tyrant, stronger than they, stronger than all the world. Its power held them, enchained them, impelled them to finality.

At last they lay in each other's arms, spent with happiness, warm and content, their beauty forever intermingled, their hearts beating with the same pulse of transport, the touch of their yearning flesh telling the endless tale of their devotion. In his arms she was safe, protected forever. She knew it. His arms held her lightly, but with infinite security.

"I knew it would be like this," she whispered, half dreaming.

"I love you so much," he answered.

The darkness lifted slowly, a veil withdrawn, slowly, slowly ashen gray and cold. In this chill translucence came sanity, and remembrance, realization. Louellen sat up suddenly, tearing herself from him.

"Oh," she cried. "My children—my mother—"

He sat beside her, trying to comfort her, troubled, driven back from her, unable to reach through and hold her.

"Mart—I must go. My children. Oh, I forgot. I forgot everything but you. What shall I do—"

She had risen, setting herself in order with desperate, fumbling fingers. He swung himself up beside her. "Louellen—you can't go back—you can't go back now. I won't let you."

They faced each other in the grayness, the chill, and suddenly she put her hands up over her face. "I've got

to. I—I never could stand it. What would I do? And you, Mart? And people—and my mother—and Annie—oh, I was crazy!"

"But I can't let you go back to him, Louellen." It was torn from the depths of his heart, the protest. "I'll come on over there and tell him, hold you back from him. I'm only flesh and blood—I can't stand everything, either."

But the relentless dawn forced itself in, bringing clarity, reason. He knew how the country would ring with this, if it knew, what degradation would be forced on her, how she would be isolated, ostracized. Worse—there were laws. . . . His unwilling brain reminded him of a terrible case some years before. The angry husband had the woman jailed, sentenced. He had seen John Henry whip his horses. What might he not do to Louellen? He stood back from her, but his involuntary protest continued, his flesh stronger than his understanding.

"I can't let you go back to him. I'd kill him first. Don't—don't do this, Louellen."

But she was already at the door, only now she turned to him again. "So long as I live," she said, "he shan't ever touch me. But—I must go back—I must."

"But, Louellen—" He was silent. The glory of the night had gone from him, too. He was helpless to protect or comfort her if she stayed. And his love for her told him that it was better to be parted from her than to be with her and have no power to shelter her as a man shields his own woman. It would damn him triply deep with shame if she was shamed. Only, how could he bear it to lose her again? How could he bear it!

She had watched him, she saw that he accepted. Now she could go. "I don't care if 'twas a sin," she said. "I'm not sorry. I never will be sorry. Don't you ever think I'll be sorry, Mart. I'll be glad all the rest of my life."

She opened the door, ran out into the lightening dawn, and vanished in its mists.

PART TWO

NOTE: The characters in the Second Part of the story are largely the same as in the First Part, save that Louellen Hyde has a third child—Judith, called Judy,—and Lee Kemp, the son of Joe Kemp, and another young man, one Ed Calloway, a well-to-do farm owner, appear as members of the new generation that has grown up in the interim.

PART TWO

AFTER SEVENTEEN YEARS

CHAPTER ONE

STRANGE and terrible, how life cools and hardens, crystallizes from its warm and facile plasticity into forms as definitely set and as rigidly patterned, but nowhere so beautiful, as beryl and garnet schist. The inchoate impulses, the chaotic passions, the indefinite possibilities of the soul that have been a fluent, plenteous current, may in some sudden and profound metastasis go arid, congeal into bleak ridges wherein existence is as barren, as open to view and as impervious to it, as in the stone waves of some extinct volcano. The valleys of the sun change to the cold valleys of the moon. The loveliness of youth is no measure of its permanence, no warrant against metamorphosis.

Louellen West, looking backward in rare moments of introspection, felt that she had never possessed youth. Her mirror confirmed her. She had stayed slight,—that comfortable plumpness and solidity that had been her mother's at middle age were not Louellen's,—but her suppleness, her spring had vanished. Still swift and deft in motion, her swiftness and deftness had become mechanical, limited, without the light swing of vitality controlled and unexpended. Her face was thin, her lips pinched, tight and guarded. Her eyes were faded, watchful. She had the look of one whom youth has fled in dismay, finding no place, no opportunity for his smiles and light vagaries.

"You've not helt your own as well as I supposed you would, Louellen," was the frank comment of Miss Becca

Simpson. "But then, I needn't to talk. Since my flesh went down I'm a wrinkled bag. Sometimes I'm most tempted to let my hair turn gray, but then I look in the glass and I say, no, I'm going to cling to the dye-bottle till I'm in my coffin. I'd be bedrid if I had to see myself going round with a head like a thistle-top."

Miss Becca was visiting. Time had not withered her perennial need of change of scene and people. Within her limited area she was as regular as the four seasons. Nor had her taste for fashion left her. She was still resplendent in the changeable silks she loved.

"I suppose I do look kind of funny in these big sleeves," she went on, tweaking at them with her little pudgy old hands, "being so short. But if you're going to be in style, I say, be in it. Don't be half-way betwixt and between, as if you wasn't sure what was what. I'm not so pleased with the high collars though—they're terrible for a neck as near nothing as mine is."

The two sat in the comfortable living room of the West house. It was bright with ingrain carpet in red and tan, shiny oak rocking chairs, fringed chenille table covers and portières. Miss Becca gazed at her surroundings with open pleasure. It was true that her rotundities were somewhat reduced, and her cheeks were wrinkled, but her bright little eyes still gleamed with quenchless curiosity and interest.

"I certainly like the way you've got things fixed up in here. Rena told me you'd done it. And I said, well, with one girl grown up and another one well on the way, they got to set some beau-traps." She chuckled, shaking with laughter.

"Yes, Virgie was dead set against all the old things," said Louellen at last. She had a piece of sewing in her hands, and her quick needle went on as she spoke. "All Mother's old cherry and walnut had to go up attic. I didn't have so much of it, though,—Annie wanted to keep it and I was willing. She and Hance took it right along out to California with 'em, and she says at first it was the only

thing kept her from pret' near dying of homesickness. I was glad she had it. There was plenty the same kind here from John Henry's folks. My, yes. Even the darkies won't take it as a gift nowadays—they say it's so big and dark and ugly. All the same I like it better than this mess of varnish."

"I don't. Give me the new things every time. How's John Henry like it?"

"He'd like anything if Virgie or Bud chose it," said Louellen. She made no complaint. She merely stated a fact. "Of course Bud don't care anything about this stuff, or any other. He's a regular boy. It'd be funny if he did."

"My, my, Louellen, seems queer to me to see you with three great big children when I can mind you as nothing but a little tot yourself. Tempus does fugit, as old Mr. Horsey wrote to Maria Fountain. And Annie with three, too, just the same selection as yours, two girls and a boy. I wish your Ma could've lived to see 'em."

"Ma never was the same after Pa died," said Louellen, going on with her sewing unmoved. This was Miss Becca's customary epic of old times. It was recited each time she came. "She just pined away. Seemed to me I could fairly see her going, soul and flesh both. She never had any hold on things after they moved to town. Couldn't get used to it. She kept all of Pa's little things, Miss Becca, his watch and his big pocketknife and his shiny black ruler that used to be in his desk, and his pens, tied up together, right in her top bureau drawer. The paper was all creased from her opening them to look at when she was in her room by herself. I've got 'em yet, just the way she left 'em."

"I've seen many a woman go all to pieces when her home was broke up," said Miss Becca, rocking joyfully, "many and many a one. I think the breaking up's most as hard as death."

"Yes, it is," said Louellen. She dropped her sewing and looked off with darkened eyes. "I remember something else —you know our clock with the glass door and the basket of

fruit painted on it? Well, I wrapped it up and laid it in a box, and Edward, he was our old colored man, he said he'd nail a strip over to keep it steady and from getting broken, and when he begun to drive in the nails the hammer strokes echoed in the clock—'Han! Han Han!'—that sort of a sound, loud and dreadful and sort of wild, and right up to that time I hadn't thought so much about it, but I saw Mother's face. She threw out her hands like she was pushing something off her, and she opened her mouth, and her eyes got wide—oh—and every blow Edward struck to a nail the clock would holler again, 'Han! Han! Han!' like it was begging somebody to come help it—oh, me—I thought I should perish, it hurt me so. I went up to Mother, and put my arms round her and held her, and she was stiff as a tree-trunk. And then she give way and cried—out loud—almost screams." Louellen drew a long harried breath. "I've never told a living soul about that before. When Annie asked me if I wanted the clock, after Mother died, I said, my soul, no. Every time I looked at it I'd've seen Mother, breaking her heart so."

"It's the truth," agreed Miss Becca. "Little things the dead has left will hurt you worse'n a cut with a knife sometimes." She turned back to lighter themes, patting her richly curled dark front with an appreciative hand. "Why don't you touch up your hair a little, Louellen? You're a sight too gray for your years."

"I haven't got the time or the inclination. I leave such goings-on for gay young things like you, Miss Becca." The hard-etched severity of her face relaxed into an affectionate smile for her old friend. "What say we sit out on the porch? It's close in the house to-day." She rose, and still holding her sewing, ushered her guest through the front hall to the porch. A group of rustic rocking chairs waited occupancy, and at one end, half in the sunshine, an old buffalo robe, a dark and hairy square with a scalloped tattered edge of scarlet cloth, was laid flat. On it, in a tumbled heap, absorbed in a book, sat a young girl. At the

sound of steps she slid the book behind her, apprehensively.

"My lands, it's Judy," exclaimed Miss Becca, blinking. "Sitting so doubled up I didn't make her out for a minute. Come here and give me a kiss. Well, ain't she getting tall?"

Judy obediently rose, dropped her book and the apple she was eating, revealing herself slender, but well grown, with a child's manner and a child's engaging smile.

"Oh, Miss Becca,—I'm glad to see you!" She frankly hugged the guest.

"And I'm glad to see you," exclaimed Miss Becca, warmed by this enthusiasm. "Shooting up like a weed—tall as your mother pret' near. And as gay as a posy."

It was true. Judy was a creature in the primary colors, red cheeks, yellow hair, blue eyes, all luminous and vivid with youth, untouched, fresh, delectable, yet with something of sensitiveness, of frailty about her brows that her physique belied, but that made her undeveloped beauty flower-like and appealing.

"I hope you've come to stay a long time," she said. "I do believe you're using some sort of new cologne." She sniffed at Miss Becca mischievously.

"Go along," protested the old lady, delighted. "You find out everything. Yes, it is a new kind—I told Jeff Bangs in the drug store I was sick and tired of White Rose, so I got me a bottle of Jockey Club this time instead. How d'you like it?"

"Grand. And I like your dress, too. It's new, too, isn't it?"

"Yes, miss, it is. And I've got another new one. And if you come and help me unpack before supper, I'll show it to you."

Judy retreated to her book and her apple, with a little skip of pleasure. "All right. I'd love to."

Miss Becca looked after her fondly. "Judy don't favor Virgie and Bud none, never did. Looks more like your side of the family with that corn-silk hair. Not like you, exactly, either. You wasn't so fair."

"Everybody says she's the image of Annie when she was little," said Louellen decisively, a thread of vigilance in her voice, "and I think so myself. Annie's hair got darker as she grew older, though. Judy's got a lot of Annie's ways about her, too. You know,—lively, and easy hurt in her feelings. I must show you the picture Annie sent last month of her children, Miss Becca. Remind me if I forget it."

"I'd love to see it. Wisht Annie didn't live so far away. Does she ever say anything about coming back East?"

"No. Hance has done so well out there, and they like it. But I miss her—seems as if it gets more instead of less, the longer she's away. Her being so far leaves me without any close kin, as you might say. Father's and Mother's folks have thinned out so. There's no use talking, nobody can keep track of cousins when they get up in the seconds and thirds, unless they're somewheres near by where you can set eyes on 'em occasionally."

"Ain't it so!" Miss Becca's eyes wandered back to Judy. "What's that she's sitting on—an old-time buffalo robe, ain't it? Now that takes me back—time was when ever'body used to have one for driving in bitter weather, but you don't hardly see any, nowadays. Was it your Pa's?"

"Yes. I have it dragged out here most every bright day. The sun keeps the moths away. It's a heavy old thing, not any use, but there—it's like life. We get all cluttered up with things we don't ever use, but can't seem to throw away."

"Ain't it so!" exclaimed Miss Becca again. She meditated on the superfluities of existence dreamily. Then her eyes snapped open.

"What you reading, Judy?"

"A book I got out of the Sunday School library. It's called 'Juliette, or Now and Forever.'"

"Put it away before your Pa comes in," said Louellen. "You know he don't like to catch you reading."

Judy gave an impatient twitch of her young shoulders. "But this came out of the Sunday School library, Mother.

He don't mind them so much. And I've done everything I had to do, to-day, every single thing."

"Where's Virgie?"

"Upstairs sewing on her white organdie dress."

"Don't you want to get yours and sit here with Miss Becca and me and sew on it awhile?"

Judy looked up intently, laughter in her eyes. "Now, Mother, you know I want to read. I'll get the dress done in time for the rally."

But Louellen persisted. "Go and get it anyway, and I'll run the hem in for you. Maybe you'll get tired of reading after a little and want to sew."

Judy felt the pressure of reasons unsaid, insistence with a motive unexpressed, but no less urgent. She rose reluctantly and went into the house.

"She reads too much," said Louellen to Miss Becca, explainingly. "Her Pa and I don't like it."

"Makes the eyes weak,—reading," agreed Miss Becca.

Presently Judy returned, her arms full of airy fabric, her sewing bag dangling from her arm.

"That's real sweet-pretty," said Miss Becca. "I do like to see the young girls all decked out in white. Blue sash for Judy, I reckon."

"Yes, and red for Virgie. She's going to have five ruffles and I'm going to have three. She's going to whip lace on hers. But I told Mother that's too much work for me."

"You'll catch a beau in all that finery," prophesied Miss Becca. "I und'stand Virgie's going with the young minister."

Judy giggled. "Bud says he don't know if it's Mammy Rachel's fried chicken or Virgie that Willy Todd's after."

"You Judy—you ought to be ashamed," rebuked Miss Becca, smilingly. "Well, I never did see a Meth'dis preacher that wasn't fond of fried chicken—laws knows they must eat enough of it, one year's end to another. Minister coming—kill a chicken, beat biscuit, stir up a chocolate cake. That's the ticket. Young Willy's a right nice boy—not that

I think he'll ever be the equal to his Pa in awesomeness—the P'siding Elder was the only preacher I ever listened to who could make me feel my sins was as scarlet. Honestly, he used to scare me. I'd go home and look at my silk dresses and my dyed hair, and make up my mind I was nothing but a wicked old rattle-trap, full set on vanity and nothing else. But the next day I'd get over it. A body can't live with hell-fire forever scorching at their heels, I say."

Judy had left her book, and taken a chair at Miss Becca's side. Carefully she turned and pressed in the narrow hem of her ruffling, her hands a little unsure, but painstaking.

"Preachers used to talk a lot more about eternal punishment than they do now. It makes me laugh to myself sometimes, Miss Becca," said Louellen. "As if we didn't get our punishment for everything we do right here on earth. More, sometimes, than it seems like we deserve. And we get punished for things we do ignorantly, or without any bad intentions, just like we do for things we do with our eyes open, and a full sense of wrong. Sometimes worse."

"That's not orthodox," said Miss Becca, who dearly loved this sort of argument. "Not orthodox at all. I don't hardly think you ought to say such things in front of little pitchers here. And it's only half-true, Louellen. Why, look—here you're neighbor to Mart Bladen. All his life he's been a regular rapscallion, if ever there was one. And what happens to him? Nothing. He raises first rate crops, he goes around with everybody, and has a good time, he—"

"But Uncle Mart's a *good* man," broke in Judy vehemently. "He's the kindest—and he never does a mean thing. He's good even if he's not pious. Can't anybody be that?"

"He takes the name of the Lord in vain,—swears like a string-team driver, as a matter of fact. He's always playing cards—and cards are the devil's picture books. He gets drunk, and raises Cain here and there. Not that I don't

like Mart, and always did. I'm just using him as an illustration."

"He's a good neighbor," said Louellen, her face bent over her sewing. "He and John Henry get along right well. John Henry used not to like him much, but they're neighborly enough now."

"Maybe John Henry thinks he's going to save Mart's soul. If he does, he's laid out a hard job for himself."

Judy grew very red. "Unc' Mart's soul doesn't need saving."

"Ssst!" cautioned Louellen. "That's not the way to speak to Miss Becca. She was only joking."

"Yes, I was," said Miss Becca, "and I'd say it to Mart's face, and laugh at it with him, if he come by. So don't fly up, Judy. Make allowance for old folks' foolishness."

But Judy was not to be appeased. She sat grave and silent, her face clouded, busy with her work. Louellen, glancing at her, was aware of her.

"Run around and ask Rachel if she made the cheese-pie I told her about," she said. "I thought you'd relish an old-fashioned cheese-pie, Miss Becca."

"Haven't eat one since I was here last," exclaimed Miss Becca with joy. "Relish it—I guess I could. You're a great hand to keep on with the old ways, Louellen. Goodness knows I like the newfangles they're always bringing out well enough, and nobody, not even my worst enemy, would accuse me of being behind the times, but there was a flavor to the old dishes that was mighty satisfying. But nobody makes 'em much nowadays. When did I ever eat a piece of Togus loaf? And who makes milk-rising bread?"

"We have it now and again during the summer," said Louellen. "I'll have Rachel make some whilst you're here."

Judy came back and sat down again. "The cheese-pie's in the oven," was her report. "Say, Mother—look—there comes Unc' Mart now—along the road. He promised he'd bring me some candy—Hoo-oo—hoo-oo!" She called and waved both arms, then ran wildly down the lane.

"Mart spoils the children a good bit," said Louellen, looking after her, impassively. "They're real fond of him, Judy especial."

They could see the big man on the horse rein in at the call and dismount. Judy flung her arms around him and kissed him, then followed a droll rummaging through his pockets, the capture of a fat paper bag, its hasty opening, and a red and white peppermint found a quick road to her red mouth. They walked up the lane together, the docile horse with dropped rein following.

Miss Becca came to the edge of the porch to welcome the newcomer. "Speak of the devil and his imps appear," she called out. "We was just making mince-meat outa your character, Mart."

"You better be careful, or I'll tell some of the things I know about you. Miss Becca, you look prime. No use asking how you are, for you're younger and spryer than ever. How you do it beats me,—got a recipe to pass round to an old man? Good evening, Louellen—how's everybody?"

He stood straight and tall before them. Flesh had padded his body, but not in ungainly fashion. He had grown massive, but not fat. His blue eyes were still clear and mirthful, and though the years had put lines of dissipation in his face, and lines of self-indulgence, for all that he was palpably a man of strength, the diverted master of his vices, and not their slave.

"You an old man!" scoffed Miss Becca. "You'll never get old! They'll have to knock you in the head if they want to kill you."

"No such luck. Why, I'm getting so that if I ride more'n twenty miles or so I feel it next day. And my best girl, here"—he flung his arm around Judy—"my best girl here, she likes me only for candy, and when you've got to the place where cupboard love's the only thing the girls'll give you, you may as well make up your mind to settle down by the fire."

"Save some of that candy for Virgie and Bud," said

Louellen to Judy, who was deep in the bag again. "Come up and set awhile, Mart, won't you? You've been into town, I suppose." She did not look directly at him, nor he at her, but their manner was wholly unembarrassed. A little stiff perhaps, but not enough to suggest to the most suspicious that any self-conscious spark of old fires might yet remain.

"Yes, do come up, Unc' Mart," said Judy, hastening to bring a chair. "Here, set down by me. Oh my, these are good pep'mints. No licorice?"

"He was out of licorice. You're like a six-year-old for licorice." If he did not look at Louellen, his eyes dwelt continually with lingering fondness on Judy.

"I love it."

"Maybe Miss Becca would enjoy a piece before you've fingered it all over," suggested Louellen.

Judy, dashed, passed the candy bag to Miss Becca.

"I didn't mean to be greedy," she murmured. "Don't you want some, too, Mother?"

But Louellen shook her head.

Miss Becca, a peppermint drop bulging her cheek to a likeness of its former curve, exclaimed over Mart's horse. "Look at that dumb beast—more sense than most humans, I'll bet. How'd you train it so, Mart?"

Mart reached for a candy and offered it to the attentive, docile animal. "I didn't do much. Horses and dogs just naturally do for you if you like 'em. Chloe here wouldn't stand a minute for Ephum—wouldn't hardly let him mount her, for that matter." Chloe, smacking her lips over the tidbit, cocked knowledgeable eyes at her master, aware that she was discussed. She sidled toward him, daintily, and he put out an affectionate hand, slapped her shining neck, rumpled her smooth mane. She tossed her head and drew away, offended. "She don't like that," he laughed, "any more than Judy here if I mussed up her hair. Well, I got to put for home. All very well to sit on the front porch and chat with the ladies, but us farmers have got to keep

an eye on the field hands this time of year. I'll bet John Henry's right out with 'em this minute. Don't catch him going to town any day but Sunday when it's planting time."

"It's different with John Henry," said Miss Becca. "He's got a growing family to provide for. You're an old bach with never a care—though how you ever managed to get away from the girls I don't understand. If I'd a' been young when you was, Mart, you'd have had to step double-quick."

"Now, Miss Becca,—you know you only got to say the word, any time."

"Go 'long, you scamp—" she tittered, flattered. "You always were the greatest hand to soft sawder!"

"Soft sawder nothing! That's the way you treat my broken heart—"

She loved the rough banter. "It never was broken, Mart, as I heard of, but it's pretty well dinted and battered up, I don't doubt."

He caught Chloe's rein, put a foot in the stirrup, and swung himself into the saddle. "Why don't you come over and see me before you go, Miss Becca? Sally's kind of crippled with rheumatics, but she can still make a spice-cake. I'd be right glad to see you. Get Judy here to fetch you."

"Yes," she retorted, " 'fraid it'll start scandal if I come by myself, I suppose. My reputation can stand it, I thank you—even if yours won't."

"That's it," he laughed. "That's it exactly, only I was too modest to make my brags about my own reputation. Well, you come, anyway." He waved his hand and rode away. Miss Becca looked after him admiringly.

"Just as good-looking as when he was a boy," she said. "And just the same come-day-go-day Mart. It's a wonder some girl didn't get him. Della Layton tried hard enough, goodness knows. Even now they say she's crazy about him, and she's been married to old Al Chaires this ten years or more. Everybody knows she only took Al as a last grab in the grab-bag. Mart never had any time for her, and

never made any bones about it. I oughtn'to've twitted him about having no family, though. Seemed to me I saw a shadder kind of come over his face when I did. The laws knows his two sisters've got plenty, and over at Sudlersville, where I was visiting Manie Towers week before last, I heard that it's nip and tuck between 'em as to who'll make the most of Mart, and get his land and his money when he dies."

"Oh, Miss Becca," exclaimed Judy. "Don't—don't talk about Uncle Mart dying."

"Judy's real tender-hearted," interposed her mother swiftly. "She never can bear to think about death. Used to cry herself sick if one of her kittens died."

"I don't like the idea of it much better myself," confessed Miss Becca, frankly. "Well, my-o, here comes John Henry!"

Around the corner of the house appeared the master of it, still tall and dark and gloomy of countenance, an effect heightened by the beard that he had let grow in his middle age, which, with the upper lip shaved bare, gave him a severe and ascetic aspect. More, it was as if the passing years had laid a cloud of darkness on the man, dimmed him, thwarted and placed bars before him against which his soul forever waged a furtive, desperate struggle. For all his air of autocracy, for all his increased assertiveness—and it had increased—there was an uncertainty about him, too slight, perhaps, to be noticed by any but himself. His voice had lost none of its harsh and decisive timbre. His smile was still a contortion of the facial muscles, unlighted by his eyes. He greeted the guest amiably enough.

"How do, Miss Becca," he said, shaking hands. "You got here, did you? I thought I saw a livery team driving up, but I wasn't sure. How are you?"

"Nothing to complain of. How're *you?* You're not putting on any flesh, that's one sure thing."

"I guess I'm not the fleshy sort. Even if I was inclined to it I'd run it off me, I'm so pushed with work. Seems'if

the niggers get more worthless every year. What I come round for now was, I want Judy should go on out to the field and drop melon-seed for Bud."

"Judy and Virgie can both go," said Louellen, softly. "I'll call Virgie."

"I don't need more'n one. Judy can do it. Run get your sunbonnet, Judy, and hustle out."

Louellen's tone did not alter. "Yes, Judy, you run along and help, and when you get half the field planted come on in, and Virgie'll go out and finish it." She did not stop sewing as she spoke. John Henry gave her a rancorous glance, but was silent. "Don't stand gawping there all afternoon," he said, brutally, to Judy. "Do as you're told, can't you?"

Judy flushed piteously, her blue eyes seemed ready to spill tears, but she was obedient. She vanished, and so, after a moment, did John Henry. There seemed nothing more for him to say.

Louellen kept on sewing. "I try not to favor one of the girls more'n the other," she said. "John Henry kind of feels Judy's nothing but a child yet, and Virgie's a young lady, and he don't like to call on her for the odd jobs she used to do. But there's only a little over three years' difference between 'em, and I don't think there should be any distinction made. Virgie's too much inclined to stay in the house anyway. And Judy's a tomboy—when she's not got her nose buried in a book."

"They're both nice girls," said Miss Becca impartially—"everybody says so. I don't deny Judy's a little mite my favorite, but that's because she's younger, I expect, and got such little kittenish cuddling ways. She sort of draws you. Virgie's cooler, not so open-hearted. More like her Pa. Judy's like you used to be."

"Yes," said Louellen, evenly, "Judy's like what I—used to be."

CHAPTER TWO

MART BLADEN, riding homeward, had no consciousness of lingering sting in Miss Becca's words about his bachelorhood. The spring satisfied him, renewed his content with life. Each year he loved it more, for it had ceased to waken in him any troubling emotions, any regrets, any bitterness of desire unfulfilled. He had closed the book of his youth, accepting life as movement, yielding now as he had yielded then to the inevitable march of time and circumstance. There was about him no suggestion of tragedy and upheaval such as had ravaged and burnt John Henry and Louellen. His simple heart had served him well, protecting him from the cost of too much and too intense feeling. He was not insensible, but he found it impossible to look either back or forward. The present sufficed him wholly.

So now this spring day, warm as late June, flinging its urgency on the waiting land that all the veins of life still torpid and sluggish there from winter might be quickened to movement and increase—this day sent Mart Bladen along his road home well satisfied. There were sweet odors in the air, from the new leaves, from the fresh earth. He sniffed them relishingly. There were so many good smells that he remembered,—hay-fields with the emerald clover, mown down, the fallen stalks showing the gray underside of their drying leaves; sweet grass by the roadside with night dew on it; white pear blossoms as heady as fruit liquor; Sweet Gale that grows in the marshes, breath of August afternoons; little spicy swamp magnolias; sassafras and sweet-gum leaves; balsam; wild honeysuckle, matted and clinging; apple pomace lifted in a thick round cake from the cider mill; fallen leaves burning in heavy autumnal incense. He ran them over in his thought, dwelling on them as one dwells on memories of loved faces. It was a

good world. He spoke to Chloe. "Tired, old lady? Go 'long—you're not tired. B'lieve I'll ride you down to Tuckahoe to-night yet, so don't go playing me any tricks." She tossed her head petulantly. "That makes you mad, huh? Don't you get lazy, Chloe. You're nothing but a colt, yet."

A little farther there was a tremendous disturbance among the crowded roadside bushes and a white setter with brown spots leaped out at him, barking, jumping, wriggling in a passion of welcome so intense that it amounted to frenzy. Mart leaned to pat the wildly bobbing head, and the dog quieted himself, and grinned up at his master with affection and comprehension. "Well, I'm a son of a gun!" said Mart. "You been waiting here behind the fence ever since I started to town. Cæsar—you old rascality! Don't you know you oughta been home taking care of the place? Ain't you an old rascality, hey? You bet you are. Sticking—round—here—waiting for his master to come home, was he? Trying to snap my stirrups off, was he? Laughing and hollerin' dog-fashion, was he? You're a funny one, you are."

The dog, quieted by the loved voice, ran on ahead, and led the way to the house, waving his tail like a flag of joy. The long lane of tulip trees, taken from the woods as saplings and planted by a Bladen of former generations, had not greatly increased their girth nor their spread since Mart's youth. They were majestic trees of dignity and grace. To Mart, riding under them, they were a commonplace, yet to-day, in their tender spring renewal, they called him to look at them.

"Tulip-trees the prettiest thing that grows," he told them. "I wisht I knew just which granddaddy Bladen it was who was so fond of 'em. He did a darned good trick, planting 'em for me." He looked on, up to the house. "Hello, somebody's here. That's Doc Tithelow's shay—I know it by its low-hang. Hustle up, Chloe."

The chaise was just turning to go, Ephum standing at the side, as he cantered up. "Hello, Mart, how are y'?" called the doctor. "I was passing and dropped in, thought I'd

leave a bottle of liniment for Sally. And there was something else—Joe Kemp's dead."

"The deuce you say! When did it happen? Say, light and come in, Doc. Stay to supper."

The doctor hesitated. "I don't know but I will. There's no reason why I should get back to town till this evening." He climbed heavily out of his chaise. "Ephum, don't feed my horse too heavy—he's been colicky lately. Let him have a drink of water now, and feed later."

"Yessir, yessir," said Ephum, at the horse's head.

"And tell Sally Doc'll be here for supper," added Mart.

The two men went into the house as Ephum disappeared with the horse and chaise. The big bare sitting room was dull with coming evening. Mart stooped and lit the fire, already laid, on the hearth. "We don't really need it, it's so warm," he said apologetically, "but it livens things up. Set down, Doc, and I'll pour you out a little nip o' liquor. So Joe's gone, is he? I didn't know he was so near the end. When did he go?"

"This morning. God, I'd hate to die like he did. Suffer! That man suffered like hell. All the morphine I could stuff into him wouldn't ease him off. His guts were rotted green with liquor."

Mart had taken a decanter of whiskey from the cupboard, and a couple of glasses. He poured out the liquor, stiff drinks, three fingers high. "Wait a minute." He went out and came back with a thick old glass pitcher filled with cold water. "Shall I pour some in, or—?"

"I'll take mine neat." The Doctor's heavy fingers gripped the glass, and lifted it eagerly to his lips. "I needed that," he said. "Prime stuff, Mart."

"It's the finest Baltimore rye, and I got this barrel direct from Henry Walters, let's see—I reckon I won't say how many years ago. No use reminding myself how fast I'm shoving along."

They sat before the fire, the whiskey on the table between them, the flames mounting, giving color and cheer to the

bleak whitewashed walls, the battered, uncared-for furnishings.

"I reckon I'll ride over to Joe's after supper," said Mart. "There might be something I could do. I don't suppose Tillie'll have enough left to pay the undertaker. Old Billy Calloway's held a mortgage on the place for's long as I c'n remember. Now he'll close in, the damned old spider. Well, Joe was a good fellow—his own worst enemy, as the saying goes."

"Never knew how to use his liquor. But there, he was like all the Kemps, heady and go-as-you-please, and they all had a queer streak. You don't recollect Joe's great-uncle, old Cap'n Tom Kemp, do you?"

Mart laughed. "Just barely—funny little old man, little hands and feet, like a girl's, lazy as the devil, always on horseback. People used to say he slept in the stable, so's to mount his horse soon as he woke up. He was a curio. But he could ride! I mind him galloping down the road like a streak when I was a youngster in my mother's lap, sitting his horse straight as an arrow."

"Yes, he was a curio. I was there when he died, and he called his wife and his oldest boy. 'I'm a-dying,' he says, as determined and as chipper as you please, 'and I want you to promise me to bury me with my coffin half way out of the ground, f'r I expect to go straight through hell and back again, and then I want to look round and see what the damn niggers are doing!' It was right after the 'mancipation proclamation he died. I was home on a furlough—that's how I happened to 'tend him. I was thinking about it, there with Joe, this morning. He's got a little of the look of old Cap'n Tom, only bigger, of course."

They lapsed into silence, until Ephum brought in lamps. "Suppeh raidy," he announced, and they went out to a meal of cold sliced ham, hot potato bread, split and buttered, creamed potatoes, cottage cheese, hard-boiled eggs, sun-preserved raspberries, wine-colored, thick with rich sweetness, pound cake, a golden mound.

"Sally say not much suppeh to-night," apologized Ephum, "she 'low her mis'ry was so bad she di'n get roun' ter what she laid out t' have."

"I guess we can make out," said Mart.

"I can always make out when I get some of your home-cured ham," said the Doctor, relishingly. "That's the meat I love."

"Ephum, you go on out to the smoke-house and get down a ham and wrap it up and put it in Doc's shay," commanded Mart. "Don't say a word, Doc—we got plenty. I only hope you'll enjoy it."

"Poor Joe," began Mart presently, "he was a wild one. Good-natured, too, when he wasn't in liquor, but an ugly customer when he was. Tillie's had a hard row to hoe."

"She ought to've left him. Nobody would've blamed her."

"Yes, they would, too. You mightn't and I mightn't, but you know most people would've said it was her place to stick to him, no matter what he did."

"I suppose you're right. There's a high average of domestic faithfulness—on the surface at least—all through this county. I remember when I first came down here from the North, when I was a young man, noticing and thinking about it, and the feeling's just the same still. Rough on women, though. They talk about marriages being made in heaven! Why, I could match up the people in this neighborhood a damn sight better than heaven, if heaven's really responsible." A shadow passed over his face. He was thinking of his own tiresome shallow wife who had been a weariness and a thorn to his comfortable busy existence. Mart did not notice.

"Yeh—you're mighty smart, Doc," he answered jocosely. "But don't you set yourself up too much. Just because you're in at all the bornings and the dyings don't make you out any divine providence, you know."

The Doctor retreated to safer ground. "It's queer how little this whole community's changed in twenty years. Roads are better, and the towns've grown up some. But

folks are pretty much the same. Not much up, not much down. The Kemps are an exception. Now, they *have* run out. God, but Joe's place is a mess."

"You make me feel kind of mean. I've fought shy of going out there for a good many years now—but if I'd known he was in straits—"

"They're worse off'n most nigger renters."

"That's terrible." The meal was over and Mart was busy lighting his pipe with the eternal fussiness with which a man goes about that operation. His face, in the spurt of light from the paper spill, was clouded with distress. He was thinking of Joe as the high-spirited reckless companion of his youth.

The two men drove in silence to the Cross Roads, Chloe cantering easily beside the Doctor's chaise. As they were to part Doctor Tithelow reined in.

"If there's any question about money, I'll be glad to chip in, Mart, and so will a good many others round town, I know. Not worth while letting Tillie know where it comes from."

"O. K. I'll see what's needed. If it's not too much I'll handle it myself,—might just's well. Joe and me used to be good friends."

At the Kemp house there were confusion and disorder. Tillie Kemp, lean, haggard, bent, was scrubbing furiously, a lamp with broken chimney beside her on the floor. She looked up drearily as the door opened, showing no surprise.

"Oh, it's you, Mart. Go in the setting room. He's not been brought down yet, because the coffin hasn't come. He's upstairs on the bed."

"Tillie, you oughtn't to be doing this," said Mart, pityingly. "Where's your children? Or isn't there somebody else—?"

She swished the wet scrub rag in her hand nervously. "I want things to be clean, at least," she said with bitterness. "It's poor enough, but we can be clean. People will be coming, and I don't want them to see the house

dirty." It was evident that she was overwrought to the point of hysteria. She hardly knew what she was doing or saying. "I sent the children off to bed, they bothered me so. And there was some folks in, but they just nosed round and asked questions, and I let 'em see they wasn't wanted. We got along all this time without no help, and I reckon we can still manage, at least till Joe's in the ground."

A door was opened cautiously and a boy's head appeared, dark and scowling and unhappy.

"I told you to go on up to bed," shrilled Tillie.

Lee Kemp opened the door and stood revealed, a lad of seventeen, strong but gangling and awkward. "I ain't going to bed and leave you down here, Ma," he protested. "I told you I wasn't. I'd've wiped up that floor for you, and you know it. Good evening, Mr. Bladen—" He looked helplessly at Mart.

"Yes, and it'd've been as dirty as ever. What d'you know about doing things right? Seems like everything's against me, Mart. I—I don't know what to do—" Desolate tears began to trickle down her gray cheeks, and she wiped her eyes with her apron. Mart stooped and lifted her to her feet.

"There, Tillie, there. Come on in here and let's talk a little about what's to be done. Lee'll finish up the floor, if it's got to be wiped up to-night. Come on in here, that's a good soul."

He led the crying, shaking woman into the sitting room, and an untidy, scared girl, younger than Lee, appeared. "Why, here's Kate. Kate, you take your mother off upstairs to bed, and don't leave her come down again. I'll stay and watch to-night. You go 'long, Tillie. That's right." He spoke to her very much as he spoke to Chloe, coaxing, but firm, and finally she yielded and went off with Katie's arms around her. Mart shook his head as he turned back to the hall.

Lee was trying to finish the scrubbing and making a very

poor hand at it. "Didn't any of the neighbors come in?" asked Mart. "Or offer to stay to-night?"

"Mis' Statum and her sister come, but Ma sent 'em off. Ma thought they was just curious to see how poor we were." Lee's voice was defiant, but his boy's face was forlorn. Mart watched him appraisingly. He had long ago ceased his intimacy with Joe Kemp, whose name had become a by-word for worthless shiftlessness and continuous squalid sprees, and he knew nothing about the boy, remembered him only vaguely as an unkempt little figure that hung to Tillie's skirts. But there was something about the dogged defiance of the lad that touched and held him.

"Throw out that dirty water and wipe your hands," he said. "I want to talk to you."

"I'll finish this first. Ma'll want it clean."

Mart lowered his height to the bare boards of Joe Kemp's ramshackle floor. "Doggoned if I don't help you," he said, and rolled back his wristbands forthwith.

The two worked with awkward puffing endeavor, until at last the floor was clean, cleaner, at least. Then they went back to the kitchen and washed their hands under the pump. Everywhere were signs of poverty, shiftlessness. Lee made no comment,—he neither concealed nor revealed. His frown and his unhappiness had lightened a little, for here was a man, a real man, who was treating him as an equal.

"I expect you've been trying to work the place pretty much yourself, haven't you?" Mart asked, when they sat down at last. "Had right hard sledding, I expect."

"I got along all right," said Lee. "I got things started good this year. But it's not any use, now."

"What you mean?"

"Mr. Calloway'll foreclose. I expect he'd've done it anyway. He was threatening he would."

"Well, sir,—now," Mart sucked in his breath, considering. "And what'll you do?"

"I'm going to work. Ma, she's going home to Grandpa Hignutt's. He told her a long time back soon's Pa was

gone he wanted her to come keep house for him. Kate'll go along with her. Grandpa Hignutt, he'll take good care of 'em, though he wouldn't do a hand's turn for Ma whilest Pa was alive. Mr. Bladen—Pa was—all right—when—he wasn't drunk. But everybody went against him so—" The boy's lips quivered as he made his incoherent protest against the injustice of the world. "If folks wouldn't've been so hard on Pa—and kept away from him so—but everything he did—he never got no credit. And it don't leave us no chance. Everybody says—'Oh, you're one of Joe Kemp's children, are you?'—and—I don't know—it's not right, somehow. I don't say he did what was right, but—but—he wasn't half as bad as folks thought."

He gulped out the words, trying to command himself. Mart saw how thin he was, how his bones showed gaunt in his boyish body, how, when he turned his face toward the light, his face was marked with care and anxiety far beyond his years. "He's not had enough to eat," thought Mart, uncomfortably, and felt a fresh pang, remembering again how he had been one of those to stay away from Joe in these later years. And this forlorn child had been hungry, in all this land of bounty.

Unaccustomed to counsel, he groped for words of kindness and advice. "Shucks, now I wouldn't fret about what people do—or say," he began. "You let bygones be bygones. Not but what it's right for you to stick up for your father."

The boy stared before him dumbly. His suffering hurt Mart. Pain was so alien to him that it was harsh in another, and he had a ready sympathy for all youth. This tense, unboyish boy stirred him.

"You got any place figured out where you're going to work—or figured it out what you'll do?" he asked, presently.

"No, sir. But I can hire out somewhere round. I can do a man's work, any day and all day. I'm used to handling a team."

Mart's ideas came slowly, but they were clear and lucid.

"If you don't get anything to do you'd prefer, I'd be glad to take you on for the summer. I need another hand, somebody that'd be responsible, and look after things pretty sharp. I got to be away end of the month—jury duty—and the niggers soldier on me outrageous when I'm not right there."

Lee listened to this offer with alternating suspicion and pleasure. "I—you didn't just think that up—to—to help me?" he asked, hiding a throb of quick relief behind his surliness. "I don't want any charity. I can earn my way."

"I'd expect you to, if you work for me," said Mart. "Don't you make any mistake—you'll be on the hop from sun up to sun down, and maybe a leetle mite over, sometimes. You'd have to do your work thorough, and no slacking. And I wouldn't want to have to tell you anything more'n once."

"You wouldn't have to." He was touchy and conceited, but humble, too. "I'd like to come work for you, Mr. Bladen, if you think I'd do. You—you used to be a friend to Pa."

"I was always your Pa's friend."

The boy flushed. "I didn't mean—" he began, self-consciously.

"I know you didn't mean anything," said Mart. "Look-ahere, Lee, you're pretty well tuckered out, I expect, setting up with your Pa nights, and all. You lay down on the lounge, and I'll set up and keep watch."

"I don't want to go to sleep and leave you set up alone."

"Don't you mind about that. You've got a hard day in front of you to-morrow, son. There'll be a lot of people coming and going, like there always is after a death, and you'll have to meet 'em and talk to 'em, and everything like that. I don't believe your Ma'll be much good to-morrow, so you get some rest now."

The boy, like Tillie, yielded, but reluctantly. But Mart had judged well the depth of his weariness, for no sooner had he thrown himself down than he was asleep, a deep

devitalized exhausted sleep. The pain and sullenness and bewilderment at the cruelty and stupidity of the world that had pinched him lifted as he slept and he became supremely young, faintly smiling.

Mart watched him. "Poor little shaver," he thought with pity and self-condemnation. "He figures that every man's hand's against him on account of Joe being as he was. He's had it hard, that boy. I knew folks said Joe Kemp's boy was trying to work the farm, but I didn't look into it at all, and here he's been a lifting and straining and striving and getting nowhere. Nothing at home here but Joe drunk and Tillie whining. But for all that it didn't break down his spirit. He's got real gimp, doggoned if he hasn't. All he needs is a chance."

But he had no great altruistic motive. The boy might come and work for him, and he would treat him fairly, pay him, feed him,—that was all. Even as he lived his own life, regardless of anything but his own tastes and wishes, his own ways, his own will,—so unconsciously he ceded this right freely to other people. Easy with himself, he was easy with the rest of the world. No reformer's nor uplifter's nor regenerator's zeal ever troubled him. Life was free for all to live as they wished.

The boy slept heavily, not stirring. Presently Mart tiptoed out to Chloe. He wished he did not need to leave her in the open yard with the cold spring breeze singing about her. There must be a shed somewhere . . . he walked her down toward the barn and its outbuildings, going slowly through the blue haze of the night. Without a lantern he would not try to enter the stables, but he found a leanto, and backed Chloe into it. Sleepy chickens clucked at him from its interior.

"There now, old girl—you can roost with the hens tonight," he told her, loosening her girths, slipping off her bridle. "At least you won't be out in the dew." She nodded, knowingly, and he went back to the house.

Strange, to be here, alive and quick, with Joe Kemp lying

dead above stairs, boisterous, jovial Joe, loose-tongued, lazy if work was at hand, but alert and anxious for any piece of deviltry. Mart was glad he wasn't sitting up in the room with the body. Bad enough down here. This house, sagging, forlorn, with its cracked window panes, its broken gaping plaster, its scant dilapidated furniture—Mart shook his head. "Doc was right," he thought. "Joe never knew how to use his liquor. That was the trouble. Hope the boy hasn't inherited it. I'll have to keep the stuff out of sight, once he's over to my place."

He frowned at that. It would be a nuisance, having the boy around if he'd got to watch his P's and Q's. It might be a nuisance anyway—suppose he didn't get on with the hands? Oh, well,—he'd committed himself. And if it didn't work out one way, it would in another. Mart was not one to borrow trouble. Besides, he was secure in the confidence that, on his own acres, he could adequately handle any situation.

The long hours wore slowly away, and with the dawn Mart bestirred himself. He woke Lee, and spoke to him, putting money into his hand. He respected the boy enough not to offer it as charity, as he had first intended.

"I'm going to get along home," he said, as the boy stared at him, still heavy-eyed and hardly comprehending. "I thought you might be able to use a little ready cash—times like these unexpected things come up. So you take this, and tell your Mother you've got it when she comes down. But understand, it's a loan from me to you, and you're to work it out when you come to work for me. I'll be over again before the funeral. Tell your Ma if she wants me to be one of the bearers I'll be glad to do it. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Lee. "I'll tell her. Say—you're mighty good—"

"Leave it," said Mart. "This is a business transaction betwixt you and me."

But the boy went out with him into the early morning. He was awake now, and rested, but he had no power of

self-expression. He followed Mart very much as Cæsar followed him, and when he had mounted looked up at him with something the same look of dumb gratitude that shone in Cæsar's eyes.

"I'm much obliged for everything, Mr. Bladen," he said huskily. "I'll pay you back, every cent."

"Well, sir," said Mart to Chloe, once they had gained the high road with the desolate farm behind them, "I'm glad this night's over. We'll get home to breakfast, old girl, you and me both."

CHAPTER THREE

THE funeral of Joe Kemp made but a very slight ripple in the current of local events. Old Billy Calloway promptly foreclosed the mortgage and got possession of the homestead, its poor stock and meager rundown equipment. He put a tenant there who was half-carpenter, half-farmer, in order to get his repairs made free of all cost save the lumber. Tillie Kemp went home to her widower father, and took Katie with her, experiencing the first peaceful days of her life for over a decade. And one May morning young Lee appeared at the Bladen farm with all his earthly possessions in an old telescope bag of frayed linen and stringy leather.

"I'm ready to go to work," he announced.

"Did you walk all the way here carrying that?" asked Mart, wondering. "It looks like quite a heft."

"No, sir, a man give me a lift part way. I only walked a couple miles. It's not so much heft—only there was two-three books."

"Books, hey? You like to read?"

The boy hesitated suspiciously, but Mart's easy way had no hint of ridicule.

"Yes, sir," he said painfully, "but I won't do it in working time."

"Well, there's some books round here, up attic and in the sitting room closet you can read if you want to," said Mart, good-naturedly. "I reckon maybe you like to eat, too. I used to when I was your age—I was one of the holler-legged kind, never got filled up. You come in now and get some breakfast. Sally'll put you in a room upstairs. I sleep down." He indicated the inner door with his pipe stem.

Cæsar had been sniffing at the new arrival and the boy

reached an eager hand to him. "Your dog looks like an awful good hunting dog," he ventured.

"You like dogs?"

"You betcha." It was emphatic.

"I like dogs," said Mart. "And I like horses, and I like to see a fellow fond of 'em. And I don't allow any mean treatment of any animals on my place. I figure if a man's mean to animals he's mean clear through. And a mean man makes a mean animal. All these hard-headed, kicking, runaway horses—some man made 'em that way, probably when they was colts. I don't ever say 'break' a colt. I gentle my colts. You any good with horses?"

"We didn't have no horses worth a cent, and we didn't have much to feed 'em. But I like horses, all right." He was attacking a stack of batter cakes and spoke with his mouth full.

"Soon's you're through you come out to me—I'll be down at the barn. I'll show you my horses."

In this easy and informal fashion young Lee Kemp took his place in the Bladen domicile. Mart, watching him narrowly at first, found that all he had said of himself was true and that his nature was honest. Nor did he show any signs of his bad inheritance. Rather he was too quiet, too repressed, and had too much of the secret sullen air that Mart had noticed on the day of Joe Kemp's death. It was curiously unyouthful, almost repellent. But he was civil and respectful and went at all the tasks assigned him with desperate concentrated energy. Mart expostulated:

"Don't take it so hard, son. You're making me out a slave-driver."

The boy's answer revealed him. "I want to do extra," he said doggedly. "I want to show there's some good in the Kemps."

The only persons with whom he really unbent and became as young as his years were Cæsar and Sally. Sally scolded him, railed at him, carried on a perpetual sham-battle with him, especially finding fault with the size and

activity of his appetite. "Yo' eats lak er threshin' machine. Brek mah back ovah de stove cooking foh yo'. Eat, eat, eat, dass all you do. Nevah see such an eatin' boy." But her grumbling was invariably supplemented by the offer of some cake or sweetmeat she knew he liked. He teased back at her: "Worst cooking I ever tried to get down—fairly sticks in my craw when I try to swaller it. Whoever learned you to cook, anyway?" They would both laugh inordinately at such raillery, and it would end by Lee's bringing in an extra armful of wood or bucket of water when Ephum had been neglectful.

As for Cæsar, the dog came to love Lee with an affection that rivaled his devotion to Mart. When no one was around to see, Lee would play with him, wrestle him, roll him over, ruffle up his ears, race him until Cæsar was in a frenzy of dog-delight, and the boy almost as happy. Plenty of food and freedom from the weight of care he had been carrying gave Lee ruddiness, and put flesh on his big bones, and he even began to grow taller. But with Mart he maintained a certain reserve, and when a visitor appeared at the farm he kept out of sight, would not come to the table if a guest stayed for a meal, but asked Sally to give him a snack in the kitchen. With the negro hands he got on well, managing them with an ability beyond his years.

"Doggoned if he don't pay for himself," thought Mart, more than once. "Keeps the hands up to time, and does his own share, and more, right along. And he's good with the team."

John Henry Hyde regarded the venture with surly distrust. "Und'stand you got that worthless limb of Joe Kemp's working for you," he said to Mart, meeting him at the boundary line of their fields. "Sh'd think you'd be afraid to take a boy like that into your house. He's liable to steal everything you've got and light out, or maybe worse."

"That's where you and me differ, John Henry," said Mart, genially. "There's nothing in this God's world or

out of it that I'm afraid of, and certainly not of a boy that age. Don't go passing the word around, either, that the boy's liable to steal. There never was any thieving blood in the Kemps, nor likely to be. Their weakness is another kind—not that Lee shows any signs of it."

"Bad blood's bad blood, way I look at it," contended John Henry. And they parted on that note, Mart adding the cynical reflection as his neighbor disappeared from view: "And that's what they call a good Christian! Well, if he's on the road to Heaven, give me hell, any time."

Later he thought: "John Henry's not looking so well. And his eyes got a sort of setness like a crazy man. But shucks,—he's wiry. He'll outlast me, I bet you. And he'll not go crazy neither. Not any crazier than he's always been. He never was quite right, to my way of thinking."

He had always kept away from thinking much of John Henry. There was a certain uneasiness in all his feeling about him, a sort of pity tinging his inherent dislike, that had forced him to acquiesce in such small overtures of friendship as John Henry offered. The gigantic incomprehensible tragedy of Mart's life that had culminated in his final possession and his final and absolute loss of Louellen had always been something from which he had sheered away in his thoughts and his feelings. It was too big for him, he had no measure of sensibility for it. So he left it alone in his thoughts, he put it away from him. Only—he was steadfast that he would have no other woman. And he knew, though he could not tell how he knew, that Louellen had kept her word. She had not gone back to John Henry, or the soilure of her lawful conjugal intimacy. He was as sure of that as he was of his own constancy. It gave him a strange secret exultance to think of that, but even so, there was sometimes a haze of unreality over his conviction, a haze engendered by the sight, always near him if not always actually before him, of what this snarl in which their lives had become entangled had cost both Louellen and John Henry. They had not escaped unscathed,

as he had. They had grown hard and strange and darkly sour. They had had the bitterness of daily contention, of daily contact, violently opposed. It had dried up the springs of Louellen's youth and left her drab and colorless and hard. It had intensified the black undercurrent of John Henry's emotional life, supplied him with a sore grievance, no less sore for being concealed. Worse for him, for he had been beaten, yet he had the satisfaction of knowing that Louellen had paid a high price for her victory. Lives that are lived in a smothered flame of dissension and opposition burn out, after a while, leaving a gray and poisonous ash. So with Louellen and John Henry.

Vaguely Mart knew this thing, and yet it passed over him. Even for John Henry's biased distorted view of his fellowmen, his lack of tolerance, Mart could not always feel his old resentment. His own tolerance, wide and ready, warned him that his neighbor had been warped by powerful and malignant forces, of which he, without specific intention, had been the lever. So Mart left John Henry and Louellen alone in his mind. Here was the day. He would live in it.

But he hoped that John Henry would not pass round the word that Joe Kemp's boy was bad. He couldn't permit that. Lee was working so hard to show that there might be, even in this downtrodden branch of the once respected and well-to-do Kemp family, thrift and industry and honesty. "And if some of these overbearing Christians give him a knock in the face," thought Mart, "it might throw him back to be worse than his Pa. Boy his age can go just as hard in one direction as he can in another, and it don't take much to head him either way."

With this in mind he tried to be more kind to the boy, talking to him friendliwise. Once he came on him at his game with Cæsar, drawn by a pæan of joyous yelps and barks behind the barn. The boy stood still, abashed, confused.

"Doggoned if old Cæsar isn't laughing just like a hu-

man," said Mart, with reassuring mirth. "I never saw him so friendly with anybody before. He won't usually let anybody put a hand on him. You're quicker on your feet than I thought, young man. I used to be right light myself thataway. Come on, I'll race you down to the road and back."

For a moment Lee stared and hesitated, but the prospect of sporting competition was too much for him. He was hard on Mart's heels before they had gone ten yards, and beat him fairly by a good margin.

"Well, sir," said Mart, laughing and panting, "that's the first step I've run in I don't know when. I'll have to limber up if I'm going to run foot-races with you."

"I thought I wasn't going to beat you, you was so closet all the way," said Lee eagerly. "Mr. Bladen—you didn't let me win, did you? It was a fair and square race, wasn't it?"

"Fair and square, except that I had a mite the best at the start, so I'm licked really worse than it looked. Never mind, I'm going to supple up my joints and challenge you again."

The race made a new friendliness between them, and thereafter Lee was less reticent, more open with his master. In his heart began an intense devotion, a wordless, boundless gratitude. Mart became his hero. Nothing was too much trouble to do in service. In small ways he offered him tribute, an extra polish on the harness buckles, tools sorted and put away with care, the combing and trimming of Chloe's mane, a supershine of her silken coat. If Mart was out of tobacco Lee would be off to town for it before Mart knew it. Boy-like he tried to walk, to talk like his deity.

From his infrequent, treasured hours of reading he culled certain noble swashbucklers in each of whom he saw something of Mart—a strange mixture—D'Artagnan, Wallace, Richard Cœur de Lion, tinctured, it must be owned, with something of a more recent hero, just then looming large

in every boy's imagination, John L. Sullivan. With these he wove and flung round the older man a gallant glittering cloak of fancy, to which he would not have owned under torture, but which was no less real for being secret.

Presently he was to have other, more likely material for romance. He had taken on himself the care and upkeep of Mart's fences, and made a round of them now and then with a bag of nails and a formidable hammer. He had found a weak spot in the top rails of the back field pasture, and was intent on it when he became aware of some one near.

He looked up and there was Judy Hyde, staring at him with the liveliest curiosity. This then was the certain limb of Satan and child of sin whose presence in their neighborhood her father so deplored. It was fascinating to be in such dangerous proximity.

"I thought you was Unc' Mart, at first," she explained her presence shyly. "All bent over the fence like that. But you're not as tall as he is." He wasn't a bit mean looking, she thought, only rather cross. And she couldn't be afraid of him—he wasn't any older than Bud.

Lee flushed at the slur on his height, and forgot to be embarrassed by a stranger, and a girl besides. "I'm mighty near as tall as Mister Bladen," he retorted, drawing himself up to his full height.

She felt she must explain her presence. "I was looking for dewberries. Did you see any over there?" She added, primly, remembering her manners: "My name is Judy Hyde. This is my Pa's farm."

"Yes, I know. There's a good patch of dewberries over in that far field, near the marsh. Want me to show you?"

He led the way in silence, but the sight of vines dropping black luscious fruit broke down Judy's reserve. "These are simply grand—I wish I'd brought a bigger basket."

Lee, too, forgot to be stiff and shy. A spirit of comradeship awoke in him. "I'll get you one. You wait. I'll come right back."

He started off on a run, and all the way to the barn and back again he was in a pleasant haze. He had never talked to any girls but his bedraggled, complaining, stupid sister. Judy's fair color had filled his eyes. Why, she was the prettiest thing he had ever seen. And she was nice. She was as nice as another boy. His thoughts were ingenuous enough, but with this last ran a tingling suggestion that he was glad she wasn't another boy.

He handed her the basket he had brought without a word, staring again at her bright clarity.

"Much obliged—I'm glad it's a good big one. I'll pick enough so's you can take some up to Sally and then you and Unc' Mart can have dewberry roly-poly for supper. Kind of funny—to give Unc' Mart his own berries." They found the idea comic, and laughed together. Their friendship was progressing with each moment.

"I'll help you pick soon's I get a couple rails nailed on the fence over there."

"Look," she cried after him. "I wish you wouldn't nail up that top rail. I can't get over half so easy if you do, and this is the best way down to the river. I always cut across here."

"You got a boat?"

"Goodness, don't I wish we had! No, Pa don't believe in people going out in boats. He says it's wasting time, unless you fish, and there's nothing in the river worth catching. But I go down there and look at the water, and sometimes I go in wading. Wish I could swim."

"I can swim."

"Boys can do anything," agreed Judy, enviously. "They have a lot better time than girls."

"Of course they do," agreed Lee. "Men and boys have to do all the work and girls just laze round any way they want. Oh, yes, boys have all the fun—certainly."

"Fresh!" She turned away to her picking and he swaggered over to the fence. Yes, this certainly was a nice

girl. He had never thought much of girls, judging them all by the standard of his own womenfolk. But this girl—whew, she was pretty!

He hammered away for a while, then returned. "I fixed that top bar loose, so's you can slide it back when you want to climb over. Now if you'll let me have one of the baskets—"

They picked in silence for a while, stealing now and then inquisitive glances at each other. "Do you like it over here at Unc' Mart's?" asked Judy, pausing to eat a handful of berries.

"He's the grandest man!" proclaimed Lee with solemn fervor. "He's been so kind and good to me. And he's so easy-going—and so funny!" His limited vocabulary failed him when he tried to express his estimate of Mart's character. But he had said enough to make Judy like him intensely.

"I think so, too. I think he's the grandest man that ever lived. I don't care what people say about his not being religious, and not going to church. I don't see that it makes the least smitch of difference." But it was clear that such condemnation had hurt her, and that she felt certain qualms at going against the doctrines that had been ground into her since infancy. No member of John Henry Hyde's household but had heard a thousand times the heinousness of non-attendance at church.

Young Lee answered her with real canniness. "I don't see that going to church makes folks any better, really, inside of 'em, I mean, or even what they do and say—except they don't swear. It only makes other folks think they're good."

"Why, that's so. I never thought of that."

"I don't think old Billy Calloway's a good man, but he goes to church and everybody sucks up to him, and calls him 'Brother Calloway.' Makes me sick."

A shadow at the sound of the name of Calloway fell on Judy's ingenuous face. "Do you know his grandson? Ed

Calloway, the one that's got the big farm over towards Harmony Camp-ground?"

"No—and I don't wanta know him if he's anything like his grandpa."

Judy came nearer to him, as if for protection against something insidious, unseen. "I think he's worse," she half-whispered.

"Did he do anything to you?" asked Lee, ruffling belligerently.

"No—but—" She shook her head. "He got converted and he comes to our church, but I don't like him. Look there—our baskets both full. You take the big one up to Unc' Mart and tell him I sent 'em—with my love—and please not to forget how much I like licorice."

She turned to go, but Lee forestalled her. "If I knew when you was going down to the river some time, maybe I could get a boat somewheres, and—and—we could row around a little, early evenings."

"Will you take me—really? I'd love to go! I don't know just when, but you watch out for me. I'll come first day I can."

"All right. I'll watch out. I don't know if I can get a boat, but I'll try. One of the hands said his brother's got a boat, and he don't live so far. He's a tenant on the Salisbury place, down a ways. Say, could you go Sunday?"

"But won't it be wrong—on Sundays?" She asked it childishly, hoping to be convinced that it wouldn't.

"What's wrong about it?"

She knew very well John Henry's creed that all pleasant things were wrong, but she wanted awfully to go out on the river. "I might come late in the afternoon. We have to go to church in the morning, and Sunday School, and we get home pretty late. My Pa's Sup'intendent of the Sunday School, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"And sometimes we bring company home with us. If we did I couldn't get away. But I'll try."

"I'll watch out for you."

They parted with this promise. Judy kept silence at home about the encounter. She had heard too often John Henry's opinion of Mart's bringing the boy into the neighborhood.

"But he's a real nice boy," thought Judy. "He don't act wild, or mean a bit. I like him a lot better than I do Ed Calloway." She paused to find a word strong enough. "I despise Ed Calloway."

CHAPTER FOUR

YOUNG ED CALLOWAY, as distinguished from his father, who was just Ed, second son of "Old Billy," was one of those rare young men who, having sown a plenteous crop of wild oats of the baser sort, had turned to the light during a great revival, advanced to the mourner's bench, crying repentance, and at last, after much prayerful striving, had been converted from his former life into a supposedly better, and certainly a more open, one. He was received into the church where his grandfather, a bearded and sanctimonious money-lender and note-shaver, shone as a leader. It happened also to be the church of the Hydes. Old Billy Calloway was glad and thankful for his grandson's change of heart.

"Now the thing for you to do is to look round and pick out some smart healthy gal and get married," he advised him heartily. "And don't go cutting your eye at anybody without property, neither. Plenty of pretty girls amongst well-off folks, and if they shouldn't be quite so well-favored, the money makes up for it."

"Got anybody on your mind?" asked docile Young Ed.

"Deacon Hyde's got two girls," the old man said. "And they'll get a-plenty from both their mother and their father. Fact is, as I happen to know, John Henry's took over all the prop'ty Louellen was left when her mother died, and has got the full say of it. We're not to say poor, Eddie, but there never was a man who couldn't use a leetle more."

It was counsel that fitted in well with Young Ed's own scheme of things. He was twenty-seven and ready to settle down. In fact his sudden conversion and general change of heart had been occasioned by a hideous scare administered by a more than usual fearless and vindictive

shanty-boat wench, with whom he had been familiar. Young Ed had sought the safe and narrow path in a spasm of cowardly contrition. No more shady women for him. A nice clean pretty young girl—marry and settle down. It would be a wonderful haven of peace and security.

The word about John Henry Hyde's daughters and their future inheritance brought him to a seat farther up in church next Sunday, where he could see them closely. He did not know them well, for until now his attention had been wholly engaged by another type of femininity. He looked them over, impartially. Virgie, a dark and slender girl at the height of her bloom, her demureness denied by her scarlet sash and the wreath of poppies on her hat, interested him, drew him. She would do very well. But after the service, as he lingered, he took note that Virgie lingered also, and that the young minister hastened down from his place in the pulpit to her side. In the girl's fluttered complacence, her welcoming hand, young Ed inferred that her feelings were centered on blonde and eloquent Willy Todd and that it would be only to make himself ridiculous if he thrust himself before her. He was disappointed, sore—and then his gaze fell upon Judy, who had been screened from him by her mother during the sermon.

Judy was wearing the white organdie with three ruffles and her blue ribbons, with cornflowers on her hat, which deepened and darkened the blue of her eyes. Young Ed, beholding her, thought that she was young, younger than he wanted, but that she was worth getting acquainted with. If she was too childish and namby-pamby he could hunt elsewhere. In the meantime, a ride or two in his buggy would commit him to nothing, and his grandfather would be pleased with him for following his lead.

He renewed his acquaintance with John Henry. "I look to you for a good bit of guidance, Mr. Hyde," he told him piously. "It's none so easy for me to come into church and act like I'd always lived a life like yours. I realize there may be some who don't accept my conversion as sincere,

but of course the only thing for me to do is to show 'em that it is. If there's anything you think I ought to do, I'd esteem it a high favor if you'd tell me. I don't want to seem pushing."

The young man's deference flattered and tickled John Henry's most accessible side. To be looked up to, to have his aid and direction asked for, when it cost him no money to give both,—what could be more agreeable!

"I'll do what I can, willingly," said John Henry, with humility, for it was his way to speak of himself as least in the Lord's service. "Maybe, since there's to be no afternoon meeting to-day, you'd ride along out and have dinner with us. The Reverend Todd is coming. You ought to get to know him better, now you're one of his congregation."

"I'd be pleased to, if you think Mrs. Hyde won't mind an unexpected guest."

"No, no,—there's always room for one more at our table."

"I've got my team here, perhaps I could take one of your family in the buggy with me, long's you've got the Reverend, unless he's driving himself."

John Henry hesitated. Bud had driven in a single rig for this very contingency, the arrangement being that he and Judy would drive home together, while Louellen, Virgie, the Reverend Todd and John Henry occupied the carryall. It would not be exactly conventional—since there was no open engagement between Virgie and the young minister—to let them drive off alone together. It would seem too pointed.

"I might take Miss Judy," offered Calloway, and it was so arranged. Bud would not mind going home alone and it would not be politic to refuse Calloway's offer, when he had made it so politely. Judy, flushed and excited at the prospect of a buggy-ride with a strange young man, was packed in with Young Ed, feeling that every soul in the lot of home-goers from church had gimlet eyes and that all these eyes were centered on her new adventure. She

sat quite stiffly and talked little,—at first from shyness, but before they had covered half the distance she was silent from dislike. If this was the delight of having a beau that Virgie and her friends giggled so about, why, then, they were very silly, and she, Judy, would prefer to stay a child, forever and ever.

"How do you like my trotter?" Calloway asked her as they started off and got away from town.

"He's a very pretty color," replied Judy with great primness. But she had not spent her life near to horses without knowing something about them. "But isn't he a little skittish?" she asked, seeing how restlessly the beast pranced, and how he tossed his head. She looked more closely. "Why, you've got a curb bit on him."

"You're a clever girl to see that. Yes, I've got a curb on him—he's a runaway. But he don't run away any more, —not with that on. I could cut his mouth open three inches and not hardly feel it, in my arms, I mean. And before he near 'bout pulled my arms out of their sockets."

"A bit like that's cruel," said Judy. Uncle Mart had told her so, many times.

"It's not cruel if he behaves himself," said Calloway. It was hard to find anything to say to her, for he was not used to this sort of girl, and he must be careful. But he found her flesh tempting. Her cheeks were like ripe fruit.

"I wonder just how old you are?" he asked, insinuatingly.

Judy was deciding that she didn't like him, and she found the question distasteful. She plucked up her spirit. "It's in the family Bible, out home."

He liked that. "You're very sarcastic, I see."

Judy wondered if she was sarcastic. She didn't know exactly what he meant, but it sounded fresh, and he was probably making fun of her. So she wouldn't answer him.

"You like to go buggy-riding?"

She couldn't disregard that. "Oh yes."

"I'll have to take you some time."

The condescension of it reminded her of Bud in his

lofty moments, such as all brothers occasionally display to younger sisters, so she answered as she would have answered Bud. "Oh, don't put yourself out."

"By George, you're sharp—I thought you were just a nice little girl, but I reckon you know your way round." And he laughed.

There was more of this inconsequential chatter, but it all ruffled and fretted Judy, for she did not like to be teased and she liked even less the way he looked at her. When he helped her out of the buggy, she avoided his hand, jumping nimbly, regardless of her ruffles. She ran on into the house. Young Ed's horse was a good one, so they had reached home before the others, and there was no one she could tell but Rachel. She hurried to the kitchen.

"Mammy Rachel, Pa sent me home with Young Ed Calloway and I certainly don't like him. He makes me think of a toad. His hands all cold and kind of damp! And he's got toad's eyes."

Rachel, busy with dinner, stopped to lean and peer. "Whut Calloway is dat you say—Young Ed? En you ridin' round wid him? Yo Paw mus' be plumb outen he haid. He ain' fitten—" She stopped, drew down her upper lip and stuck out her lower one until its yellowish lining showed. This was her way when deeply suspicious or angry. "You stay in here and holp me twell de res' of 'em git yere," she commanded. "Comp'ny er no comp'ny, he's trash. When he gits his hoss put up he c'n set in de pa'loh en twirl he thumbs, ef he be so minded. You go on up de back stair en tek off yo' hat en git yo' ap'on. I gotter dozen lil chores right yere f'r you."

She kept Judy by her side until the others came, but, peering in at the dinner table, later, she saw that Ed Calloway was seated beside the girl. Judy was her darling and she had always resented the way John Henry Hyde treated her. So now she tossed her head angrily and sniffed and muttered in the kitchen. Young Ed had roused two active dislikes. But John Henry was pleased with him.

He took Judy sharply to task for her indifference. "I don't want to see any more such uppishness as you showed to-day to company in this house. Nobody to meet Mr. Calloway when he got his horse put up, and he having to sit on the porch till we got home. Either you'll behave properly, or you can't come to the table."

To which Judy answered nothing, for she was afraid of John Henry's violence against her. He had whipped her cruelly many times when she was smaller, and he never spoke to her save harshly. But she talked it over with Virgie.

"Did you like him, Sis? Did you think he was nice?"

"No," Virgie admitted. "I didn't care much for him. But he's real well off, and he's got a fine team."

"He uses a curb bit on his horse. That's awful mean. And he sat there talking to Pa and Mr. Todd like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. I wish you'd tell Mr. Todd—maybe he'd talk against him to Pa. I don't want him to come here to see me."

Virgie was sympathetic. She could afford to be, as a girl singled out for the attentions of the young minister. All the same, she was prudent. "Don't say anything in front of Pa, but if Ed comes round again treat him very cool, and show him you don't like him, and he'll probably go off and hunt up somebody who'll be nicer to him."

"If treating him cool will get rid of him, I'll make him think he's in Greenland's icy mountains," promised Judy, vindictively. "Oh, Sis—I don't want a beau anyway, not till I get to be as old as you, and then maybe I'll get a nice one like Mr. Todd."

"He is nice, isn't he?" said Virgie with rapture. "And don't he preach powerfully? I shouldn't wonder if he got to be Presiding Elder like his father was. Oh, wouldn't I be set up!"

"You'll make an awfully good minister's wife. You always know just what to say and do, and you never get excited and act foolish." Judy was wistfully admiring of

Virgie's behavior, but now she giggled: "And for goodness' sake, Sis, don't go round wearing such dumb looking clothes as old Mrs. Truitt used to wear. 'Member her bonnets?—looked just like a crow's nest."

"I thought about that," confessed Virgie. "Of course, I suppose I'd have to give up wearing red, and that's a pity for it's so becoming to me. But I don't think a minister's wife ought to wear red, unless it's very, very dark, garnet color, maybe, or something like that. But I wouldn't have to wear tacky things. Still, I won't have much choice on a preacher's salary."

"Maybe he'll soon get a better charge."

"Oh, he's bound to. But I wish I'd have money of my own, a little. If Ma hadn't been so silly and let Pa take all Gram'ma West left her—" Even Virgie, his favorite, had no illusions about her father, but she glanced about uneasily as if for fear he might hear her, and she lowered her voice.

"Oh, Virgie—hush!" cried Judy. It was disloyalty to their Mother.

But Virgie had a mind of her own, and she could remember. "Ma couldn't help it—he nagged at her so. For a good man, Pa certainly does like to lay up treasures here on earth."

"If he hears you! Oh, it isn't right to say things like that."

Virgie had half scared herself. She went back to safer topics. "If Pa gets set on your being nice to Ed Calloway, you'll be in for it."

"Oh, Virgie, you don't think he will?"

Virgie was in guile her father's own child, as shrewd as he.

"Don't let him see how you feel, then. You know how he is."

Judy knew how he was. She had lived all her young life in the shadow of his displeasure. He had denied her as much schooling as the others, he never gave her the

small indulgences which he sometimes vouchsafed Bud and Virgie. Once or twice when he had been specially partial and unfair, her mother had risen in unaccustomed spirit and fought it out with him. Judy was painfully aware that these encounters did not better her lot, save for the moment,—rather that they increased his venom against her.

As a very little child she could recall pressing up to John Henry with the two others, in his rare moments of demonstrative affection for them, and always finding herself repulsed. Virgie and Bud sometimes gained his knees and the circle of his arms, but never Judy. "Take this child away," he would command Louellen or Mammy Rachel. If there was a treat of a handful of peaches or apples from the orchard, Judy did not share it, unless her mother intervened and saw justice done. Punishment, swift and severe, attended any small childish mischief, or willfulness. As she grew older, she learned to keep away from him, out of his sight as much as possible, or silent at least when she must be before him. But slowly there had dawned on her horizon a friend, a refuge, Mart Bladen.

He had found her first along the roadside, where she was trudging along from an errand to one of the tenant homes, and had asked her name, put his hand on her head and looked at her long and hard, and at last picked her up and taken her home before him on his horse. He had kissed her when he put her down and rasped her face a little with his unshaven beard. But she had not minded. His size, his fairness, the strong careful circle of his arms made her love him.

"I'll come by some day soon and bring you some candy," he had promised. Fairly shy until now, she found her tongue at the prospect of sweets. "Lickrish," she had said, firmly. And he had laughed and kissed her again and promised.

He had brought the licorice, and later, other sweets, so that she learned to watch and wait for him, and tacitly it

was understood that this was a pleasure, a tie, which her father did not deny her. But she knew he did not like it any better for that, and that he grudged it to her. Once in a while he had been violently angry about it; scenes she remembered, black splotches in her mind. He was civil enough to Mart when they inevitably met, but behind his back denounced him as an unregenerate sinner, diatribes that made Judy clench small fists, drove her out of the room to cry her eyes red against Mammy Rachel's comforting shoulder.

Still, that was her father's way. He despised and excoriated all those who did not walk the same path of devotion as himself, and at last Judy came to find his indictment of Mart almost impersonal. Only she thought that Uncle Mart must guess how her father felt, for tease and coax as she might, he never set foot across the Hyde threshold. Judy would run across the fields to the Bladen house, stop for dinner if her mother had given permission, and perched on a chair made high-seated with old agricultural reports, would share Mart's meal, and chatter her heart out to him as she could do with no one else in her small world. This was a rare pleasure for both of them, but now that she had grown so tall that the agricultural reports were no longer requisitioned, she went less often, for John Henry was beginning to look with more and more disfavor on these occasional visits. She would sometimes slip away when he was not at home, and those chances were few. But Mart remained her luminary and she his faithful satellite.

The image of Young Ed Calloway troubled and disturbed her. Up until now she had been utterly content with childish things, and beaux were something to look forward to in the far-away future when she would be as old as Virgie. It was far more desirable to slip off late of a Sunday afternoon and go rowing in a battered old boat with Lee Kemp, who was as much mere boy as she was mere girl, than to receive the mature attentions of Young Ed with his trotting horse and new buggy. His

teasing familiarities with their undercurrent of hidden knowledge were hateful to her, the more as she did not know how to parry them, and John Henry's insistence that she should be amiably receptive to these advances held always a sinister menace of punishment if she disobeyed.

Something in Lee's isolation, his unhappy childhood which she could divine, the ban he was under with all good people like John Henry, made a bond of sympathy and confidence between them. And there was his expressed hatred of old Billy Calloway at their first meeting. Judy remembered that. On the first time that she managed to meet Lee for the coveted "boat-ride" she alluded to it.

"Why don't you like the Calloways?"

Lee was frank. "Old Billy held the mortgage on my Pa's farm and he never let him have a chance to get ahead. If he was back with the interest a day old Billy'd ride up and take our chickens, or maybe a couple calves. Once he drove off our best cow. She wasn't much, but she was the best we had."

"I never heard anything so mean."

The boy laid down his oars and regarded fiercely the placid silver river. "I'd like to grind him right down in the dust, I would. The things he said to Pa—and right so Ma could hear 'em! Old Billy Calloway is a dirty dog, and I don't care if he does set in the Amen corner and give money to the missionaries, I'd say so to his face."

"I'm awful sorry," offered Judy, with intense sympathy. There were tears in her eyes, and Lee, seeing this, felt a strange stricture of pleasure and pain in his green boy's heart.

"It's nothing to take on about now," he assured her gruffly. "Only—some day I'm going to get even."

That was all that was said of them on the first afternoon. But when Judy spoke again of the Calloways it was Lee's turn to ask questions.

"Are they friends to your Pa?"

"Yes—I guess so. Pa and old Mr. Calloway talk together a lot about things at the church—and now—" She paused unhappily.

"Now what?"

It came with a burst of helpless anger. "That Young Ed keeps coming to our house. I wouldn't care if he'd just talk to Pa and Ma, or eat supper, maybe—but—but—he's always wanting me to go buggy-riding. I hate him."

"Oh, Judy!" cried Lee, betraying himself in the anguish of his cry. "Don't you go with him. You won't, will you?"

"I can't help it." And here was anguish to match her hearer's. "Pa makes me."

He did not know that he was falling in love with her, but he did know that he could not bear the thought of her riding with Young Ed.

"How can he make you? You're most grown."

But freedom was far beyond Judy's vision. She could only look at Lee, unable to explain. Her eyes plead with him to understand that she was young and soft and without adequate resistance, a dependent, too gentle to resist the impact of an authoritative will. A little of this got through to Lee. But he was not appeased.

"Does Ed Calloway want to go with you?" he demanded with jealous vehemence.

"He makes out like he does. I don't know." She plucked up spirit. "I never say a pleasant word to him, and he just acts as if it was funny. He knows I don't like him, and yet, he acts like he's my beau. Only, I wouldn't let him, you know, really be, no matter what Pa said or did."

"No, don't you, Judy. He's not fit, honest. Calloway blood's mean blood." He stopped and flushed with hot remembering unhappiness. "People say Kemp blood's mean blood, too, but it ain't so. My Pa was wild, but he wasn't mean. Don't let Ed Calloway go with you, Judy."

"I won't," she promised, but added: "My Pa's awful stern when he says somebody's got to do something."

"Your Pa looks stern," conceded Lee. "I meet him on the road sometimes and he looks like he wanted to drive right over me."

"He probably didn't mean it," apologized Judy, knowing full well that he probably did mean it. "He looks stern at everybody."

"Well, I never did nothing to him, and I don't owe him any money, so he needn't look at me thataway," declared Lee truculently.

"All right, but don't holler at me about it."

They laughed, and peace was restored. It was so quiet there on the river, and they kept close to shore, a shore fringed with pine and leaning bushes. Beyond their fluted rim of shadow the water was a lake of cool, prism-tinted sunlight, without enough current to break the sheen.

"It's nice here. I like it better here than anywhere."

"Do you, honest?"

"Honest and true. I always wanted to go boat-riding."

He stammered, flushed, at putting a daring thought into words: "I'm glad—I'm glad it's me—you—I mean—I'm glad I can take you, and—and—not anybody else."

"It wouldn't be nearly so nice with anybody else," answered Judy, simply enough. "I like you ever so much."

They were not at all self-conscious with each other, but alternated between a playful give-and-take, not without its brusque touches, and a serious puzzled discussion of the world as they found it. Rarely they had shy moments, and these were Lee's rather than Judy's. No disturbing emotions palpitated between them. They were not yet awake and aware. But Judy's "I like you ever so much" warmed and cheered the listening boy.

"I'm lucky. First Mr. Bladen lets me work for him, and then I meet up with you. I never had such a good time in all my life before I came here."

"I'm glad you came. I wish I didn't have to sneak off to go boat-riding, though. I had to tell Mammy Rachel, or I never could manage it."

"There's no harm in boat-riding."

Judy pursed her mouth. "In our house everything you enjoy is wrong, no matter how harmless it is."

Lee stared with pity, but he had heard of this stern doctrine before. "Well, don't get caught, that's all."

"I won't. If I did—oh, Lee,—I believe Pa'd whip me with a gad." She turned terror-pale at the imaginary presence of John Henry in anger.

"Did he ever?" asked Lee indignantly.

"Once. He used often to switch me, and that stung, but it wasn't—so bad. But once he got—fearfully mad—and it was about Unc' Mart—but don't you ever tell him. Unc' Mart brought me a pink hair ribbon, and after he'd gone Pa snatched it and flung it into the stove, and I cried, and he started to whip me with a big stick, and—and—Ma came in, and snatched it away from him, and put me behind her—and—and—" she stopped and covered her eyes with her hands, and went on in a low voice—"and I thought he was going to strike her, too,—but he didn't. They just looked at each other, and—and Ma said, 'There's the whipping post for men who beat children and women.' And Pa stomped out. But he never hit me that way again. There, I never told anybody but you."

Lee's hands shook on the oars. He wished they were cudgels and he could beat Judy's father with them. "Don't you hate him?" he asked at last.

This was a distance Judy could not follow. "Why—no. He's my father. 'Honor thy father and mother,' you know—"

The sordid recital had brought a shadow on the day. The sun had withdrawn behind a cloud, and the water was gray and forbidding. Lee knew that his hour was ended, and he rowed without a word to the little cove where tangled bushes hid the small sandy crescent of the landing place.

Judy jumped out quickly. "Good-by," she said; "I'll try to come again soon."

Lee watched her go, then pushed off and began his half mile row to return the boat to its owner. "John Henry Hyde's as mean as old Billy Calloway," he muttered, pulling at the oars with all his strength. "They're the two meanest men in the world."

He was still brooding over this matter when he came in to supper and he sat silent and withdrawn until through the meal. It was his first dark mood for a long time, and Mart saw it with surprise and sympathy.

"This is most too nice an evening to feel grum," he suggested at last, and the words broke through the boy's trouble. He followed Mart around to the front porch where he was wont to smoke his after supper pipe on summer evenings.

"I got something on my mind," he said worriedly. Mart could not help a twinkle of amusement, but he did not show it.

"Want to talk to me, do you?" he asked kindly. "Fire away."

"You remember that day I went down to mend the fence and Judy Hyde come along picking dewberries and sent you up some for supper?"

Mart nodded. At Judy's name he became curious, attentive.

"She said she wanted to go boat-riding and so I borrowed a boat and took her two-three times on Sunday afternoons. And she—she has to sneak off to go. She says Mr. Hyde would prob'ly whip her if he knew it. And, Mr. Bladen—she told me—" He went on and told the story of how Judy's father had whipped her with the heavy stick, and as he told it his eyes glittered with tears of sheer rage and helplessness, and as Mart listened, the blood suffused his face in rage, and the two men were wrapt in intense sympathy by their suffocating indignation.

"She said not to tell," said Lee, at last. "But I thought you ought to know. I—I won't take her out boat-riding again if you think maybe it would get her in trouble at home.

It's not any harm, going boat-riding, but, but—Mr. Bladen, I don't care if they do call Mr. Hyde a good man and all, and he a deacon in the church and sup'tendent of the Sunday School,—I think he's mean. I think he's mean as a skunk."

Mart heaved a deep and angry sigh. "What did you come to me with all this tale for, Lee?" he asked. "What's the idea?"

"I just thought somebody ought to know who could do something. I thought—maybe—some time—she might need somebody to help her out, if Mr. Hyde was mean to her again. And you being friendly over there, and all, and knowing them so long, and she calling you Uncle,—and anyway, Mr. Bladen, you can do anything with anybody if you've got a mind to. So I thought you ought to know. Yes, and there's something else. She told me that first. Mr. Hyde, he's trying to make her go with Young Ed Calloway. Makes her go buggy-riding with him. And she don't like to."

Mart Bladen answered this with a vile and satisfying oath. "What's that—Young Ed Calloway? I *heard* he'd turned pious and joined the church since Rilly Ford tried to knife him, but I didn't hardly believe it would last. But for him to come near Judy—and for John Henry to connive at it—"

He got up and walked up and down, and swore again, while Lee watched him with admiration and satisfaction. The gross and obscene words were sweet to his ears, expressing his own feelings wholly, and proving that Mart was thoroughly at one with him. At last Mart was able to speak coherently:

"It was the right thing for you to tell me, Lee, but it must stop with us, you understand. All this is betwixt you and me. Neither one of us can do anything, of course, because nobody can interfere in another man's family matters. Outsiders can't mix into things like this. Understand?"

"I thought maybe you'd go over there and lick tar out of Mr. Hyde," suggested Lee, rather disgusted with the policy of caution. "Pa used to tell how you licked Jere Willis, once—prettiest fight, Pa used to say, he ever had the good luck to see."

"Yes, and look—if I licked John Henry Hyde—who d'you suppose his spite would be took out on? No, Lee—that wouldn't do her any good."

"That's so. He'd treat her worse'n ever. Say, Mr. Bladen, d'you think I ought to take her out boat-riding again, if it might make trouble for her with her father?"

This was a matter to be considered. "I don't know's that makes any difference," Mart decided at last. "I don't believe, hardly, that he'd lay hand on her to whip her. Judas Priest! I wisht she'd told me! Plucky young one! I wonder. . . ." He felt walled, boxed in. If he made any move, any definite and open move for Judy, what an odd palatable morsel it would make for gossiping tongues. No, his hands were tied. Yet, Ed Calloway—why, Ed Calloway was muck! Not to Mart Bladen did conversion and public repentance wash away such sins as young Ed's.

"You like Judy?" he asked Lee abruptly.

"Yes, sir, 'deed I do," answered Lee promptly, and all was so clear now between himself and Mart that he could so answer with emphasis and feel no confusion. Mart, seeing this, was relieved. "They're just children," he told himself. But he continued his catechism:

"You two ain't been sweetheartin' any, off boat-riding so?"

Young Lee went red up to his neck and over his ears and forehead, but he didn't falter. "No, sir. I'm too poor to think about making up to any girl, and she—she don't think about such things, neither. That boat-riding was just—was just—to pleasure her. She said she wanted to go. And she's friendly—and nice—to me."

"M-m-m, yes. Well, son—you keep it just so. And take her again, if she can go. And if you hear anything

more, you tell me, but keep your tongue still about it everywheres else. And if it should fall out that John Henry hears of you taking her out, and comes at you over it, let me know, right away. And just one thing more. This may not be anything at all—maybe we're building a mountain out of a mole-hill. So don't get all worked up and go floozing around, unless you're pretty sure you're not making yourself ridiculous,—or letting Judy in for any trouble. See what I mean?"

"Yes, sir, I reckon so."

The talk was over. Lee went off to make his self-appointed evening round of the barn and stables, Cæsar loping round him. He was no longer sullen or dull or loutish and awkward. Good food, freedom from present shame and worry, the prospect of a future, responsibility that he could carry, the self-respecting amount of his wages, friendship,—these had made him over, quickly, because youth is resilient and responsive.

"Doggoned if he's not getting to be a real good-looking boy," thought Mart. "Holds his head up and answers like a man. Sensible, too, for all he's only a kid. Clean and decent. A sight better than that smear of a Young Ed Calloway. A-a-a-gh!" He spat heavily over the porch rail to get the taste of Ed Calloway's name out of his mouth. But he remained there in the summer dusk, thoughtful, a heavy crease of worry between his brows. It had been so long since his emotions had been strongly engaged that he was bewildered and unhappy by their arousing. Though he had counseled Lee as best he could, he was not sure that his counsel was the best. He did not want to be disturbed from his quiet way. He hated the unknown. The kinship of his open quiescent fields was strong upon him. They could live in quiet, and in peace, accepting sun and rain, plowing time and harvest. So would he live, and everything beyond that disturbed him. And yet, and yet, he must not fail Judy. If Judy was in danger of being pushed into the hands of Young Ed Callo-

way. . . . Mart Bladen rose and stretched his strong arms as one who would do battle.

"Ephum," he called. "Ephum. You go saddle Chloe and tell Lee to saddle up a horse for himself and we two'll go ride down the river-road. I got a prejudice against sitting still on a night like this."

It was the first time he had ever asked the boy to ride with him, and it marked the beginning of a new and closer companionship, a real affection between them.

CHAPTER FIVE

JOHN HENRY HYDE was finding life intolerable—it pressed upon him as a crown of thorns. He had reached the time when a man must look back to satisfactions, and forward to larger ones, if he is not to find the path toward age crushing in its narrowness and uncertain end. His will fretted and rebelled against passing on into this uncertainty without having been paramount. He saw no compensations. What to him, in his corroding thoughts, were his fertile, docile farm lands, his productive cattle! What to him was his exalted position in the church! What to him were the two children of his likeness, the ordered rule of his house, when against these he felt the constant humiliating sting of Louellen's long-time rebellion, outwardly smothered, and concealed, but flaring now and then into its old strength, always to his confusion. And the fresh untouched fairness of Judy—that was another cankering sore. He hated both these women, hated and feared his hatred, being assured that it was deadly sin and would drag his soul to hell. If he went to hell, he gloomily assured himself, it would be the fault of Louellen, primarily, and Judy, secondarily. He longed to destroy them both, to destroy and hurt Louellen as he had destroyed her in those first glorious days of his marriage, when he had mastered her utterly, mind and body and spirit. Longed to destroy Judy, because she was what she was.

He told himself that he was sick with longing for perfect righteousness,—that because he had been denied the right of headship in his house, because he had not been able to bring it about that he should rule them all, as was right, he had been guilty of sin. His diseased and ingrown egoism assured him that all he needed for perfect happiness, for perfect, godly happiness, was dominance, the rightful

dominance that should be his over all the lesser creatures of his household. This dominance, achieved, would blot out his sin of weakness, establish him again. It was so he justified himself in his thoughts.

All unconsciously this crisis had been provoked, induced, by Judy's adolescence, her bloom and beauty. While she was a child he had overlooked her, pushed her away from him mentally and physically, save when he could gratify himself by some act of petty tyranny, some unmerited harsh punishment for her. These punishments, these unfairnesses had served as outlets for his venom. But now she was too big to whip, and he could not drive her into spasms of terror as he had when she was smaller. She, like her mother, had somehow escaped him. It was torture to him, her escape; torture to see her fairness, her light loveliness against Virgie's dark coloring that made the older girl so satisfying a replica of himself in youth, especially so since in Virgie there was a greater regularity of feature, a softer delicacy of contour than had ever been remotely suggested in his own person. Yet she was unmistakably Hyde. Bud also, with just enough of Louellen in him to make him normal, and with his mother's eyes. But Judy—lovely, shining, laughing—John Henry could not look at her without finding her an offense to his eyes and to his soul.

Louellen Hyde was aware of the deepening and clouding of her husband's spirit, but she did not know its cause. His increased fervency at family prayers, his augmented antipathy to Judy, his insistence on the smallest religious duties, his intensified unctuousness at church and Sunday School, these Louellen saw, but did not correlate. To her he was merely "harder to deal with." At times she added to this that he "was getting downright queer." But after all, he had always been hard to deal with, he had always been queer. Her loathing for him had hardened into a habit of regarding him as non-existent. In her assured rescue of body from him, now confirmed by many years,

she had ceased to be so fearful of him, dearly enough though she had bought that rescue. First by such quarrels as she had never even imagined that she could take part in, by actual physical resistance, violent and prolonged and savage, and finally by the turning over to him without question all her inheritance from her mother, buying herself with his avarice, yielding to his greed in one direction where she would not satisfy it in another.

This being accomplished, she had turned to the plain material duties of everyday life, the cooking, the cleaning, the dairy, the sewing, the care of her children. The rest of her was dead, dead from her battle with him, and with herself, utterly dead, in feeling, in affection, for she had battled with herself as well as with John Henry, and she had killed her love for Mart in reprehension of her sin with him, had killed all memory and thought of him, had made him nothing in her life, in her mind. His light no longer beckoned and supported her. She had learned to contain herself, to stand alone. She averted her eyes from his light, from him. She killed the youth in her, the warmth, the weakness. She was glad when these things were dead.

Only for her children was she a little bit alive, and for Judy most of all. But her aliveness to Judy did not make her partial. Even-handed, Louellen dealt with exact justice amongst her three. If Judy had a new dress or ribbons, so did Virgie, and Bud was not neglected. A treat, or indulgence from her—and they were rare enough—was a triple one. Duties and chores were divided rightly. So far as she could she would not suffer John Henry to deal with them otherwise than she did herself, and every slight, every neglect, every unkindness to Judy from him she warded off or checked when it was possible. She could not always succeed, but now and then, when his harshness was too flagrant, she made an issue of it and rose to defend her youngest with a cold and determined passion that always drove John Henry into retreat. Yet when she did

this there was in her eyes that which said she was not really sorry John Henry felt this hatred of Judy. Only she would not suffer it to blight the child.

But she was not soft with Judy, nor would she allow her to make capital out of her protection. In the matter of Ed Calloway, Louellen presently took her to task for breaking the current law of hospitality, thus upholding John Henry's will.

"You mustn't be rude to people who want to do something nice for you. He's come all this way to take you for a buggy-ride. You ought to be pleased."

Judy saw that her mother did not understand, and like many young things called before the bar of elder justice, could not explain.

"I don't like Ed Calloway," was all she could offer.

"You mustn't take likes and dislikes and be notional as if you were a baby. You're most grown up and you should act with reason."

"Oh, Mother,—I don't want to be grown up if I've got to go buggy-riding with people I hate."

"Why don't you like Ed Calloway?"

"He teases me. And he looks at me—funny."

Louellen had not heard the gossip of the shanty-boat girl and the subsequent row. That was gossip which so far had circulated only amongst the men. Young Ed was to her a prosperous youth, not prepossessing, especially, but certainly not repulsive. She knew of old the tale of Judy's quick prejudiced likes and dislikes.

"You'll have to get over talking that way about people and feeling that way. I think myself you're a little too young to receive attention from young men, but I don't see as an occasional buggy-ride matters—"

Contrary to her custom Judy burst into open defiance: "I won't have Ed Calloway for a beau. I won't—I won't. Not if Pa gets mad and whips me to death I won't. I hate him. He's got toad's eyes. He's got toad's hands all cold and wet." Her helplessness, her resentment, the failure

of her mother to comprehend, had worked her to the pitch of frenzied tears.

Louellen was aghast at the tornado. She took Judy in her arms, not untenderly, and rocked her as if she were still a child. "My goodness, don't take on so. You don't need to have Ed Calloway or anybody else you don't want for a beau. Your Pa wants you to act nice to him, like he wants you to act nice to everybody that comes round, but he don't mean anything else. There—don't cry." She pushed back the heavy fair hair and kissed the hot tormented forehead. Judy was babyish, so, her hair pushed back, her body soft, clinging, palpitating with sorrow. "You'll make yourself sick crying like this."

Judy had read John Henry's purpose more truly than Louellen. "Pa'll make me go with him," she persisted.

"Now, Judy—now."

"He will—I know it. Pa likes to make me do it because he knows I hate Ed Calloway."

"You mustn't say things like that. It's not true. You know how your Pa feels about all the church people, and how he wants us all to be specially nice to them."

"But it *is* true. It's not the church people. It's me—and Ed Calloway. Pa's always had a spite against me. Oh, Mother, why has he? Why? I never do anything worse than Virgie and Bud do, but Pa—"

Louellen rose suddenly, spilling Judy out of her arms in a convulsed resurrection of feeling. The stiff mask she had forced over her face broke and vanished. She pressed her hands against her heart.

"No, Judy, no," she called out in a strange high voice. "Don't talk like that. Don't say such things."

She frightened and quieted Judy, misinterpreting. "Oh, Ma, I didn't mean it. I didn't. I'm sorry—" but her mother had gone, leaving her twice confounded. She was not any further on the way to be rid of Ed Calloway's obnoxious attentions and she had somehow unexplainably hurt and agitated her quiet Mother. She ground her teeth

against the unfairness, the incomprehensibility of the world.

"I hate being grown up," she cried to the silence of the room, "I hate it as much as I hate Pa."

It was the first time she had ever admitted that she hated John Henry, and it frightened her that she had admitted it. She had repudiated hatred for him when Lee had suggested it. But now she found it was there, that it had always been there. She hated her father. She was indubitably a wicked girl and on her way to lose her soul. Well,—lose it or not, she would stand by the truth. She did hate her father, and she knew that he hated her. Why, she could not fathom. She had always been afraid of him, but now she feared him more, for hate is a cold and terrifying guest for the warm heart of youth. "I don't understand. I don't understand. And I'm so unhappy."

To Louellen Judy's questions were so many knife thrusts. At first she could not bear them. After a little the long years of repression and deadness came to her aid, dulled the pain of the questions, forced her to consider coolly: "What is expedient? What is wise?"

The answer was obvious. She must speak to John Henry, tell him that he must not force Ed Calloway on Judy, that she was too young, she had not yet reached the time when any young man coming courting is welcome. It was not a pleasant errand, but Louellen saw no difficulties beyond the usual ones of John Henry's obstinacy and self-will. She had contended with him before, and she could again, though she always avoided it if possible. But for expediency alone, this thing must be done.

In the Hyde home after supper there was an hour when the master of the house sat alone in a bare small room off the dining room, that had been Aunt Lena's bedroom, but after her death was made by John Henry into a sort of office, for here was his locked desk, his farm accounts, his bank books and private papers, as well as small litter of farm journals, a bottle or two of homemade liniment and salve for cattle, folded carriage robes, an extra whip, boxes

of cantaloupe and melon seed saved and dried against next year's planting, and the like. Pictures of Roscoe Conkling and Grover Cleveland hung on the wall, faint tribute of an exiled son to heroes of his native state. It was a room ceiled and walled in narrow pine planking, oiled to a pleasant ruddy brown, but the air was always close and stuffy, so that there was an oppressiveness about the place that suited John Henry. He liked to be in there alone, turning over the records for Sabbath School attendance, the reports of teachers, making out orders for leaflets, answering occasional letters from other Sunday School superintendents, secure in his place in the church and the community. He did not like to be disturbed, and so he frowned when Louellen came in, and the frown was more severe because of what, in these last few months, he had been thinking of her, but about which he had held his tongue.

"Well?" he cut at her sharply.

Louellen did not feint or go at him roundabout. "Are you planning that Young Ed Calloway shall go with Judy?" she asked.

"What if I am?"

"It won't do, John Henry. She despises him, he's somehow got her dead set against him, and she's too much of a child to see how foolish it all is, yet. She's pretty young to have anybody coming to see her and taking her round, anyway, and she's got it into her head that you want to make her go with Ed."

"It's not for your interference."

"I'm not interfering. I only want you to see how matters stand. You're going at it all the wrong way by compelling Judy—very likely she'd be flattered and tickled to have a beau if you hadn't made her think she was being forced into it. She'll just act so offish to Ed that he'll shy away of his own accord."

The black vein of anger swelled in John Henry's forehead. Under his pent brows his eyes gleamed strange and ugly. "She'll do nothing of the kind. Young Ed's come

to me seeking help and counsel in his heavenward way. He's seen the light, he wants to follow Jesus. If a young man who's not afraid to confess his sins, and walk in the true path, finds himself inclined toward Judy—she's very lucky, considering everything." He flung the last word at her slurringly.

She did not wince or draw back. Rather she studied him. It was so, what she had faintly felt, John Henry was harder to deal with, he was more queer. He was always at his worst when he got going with his religious twang, but here was something more—something fanatical, excessive, something before which she had a premonition of helplessness.

She tried to be reasonable, feeling all the while that reasonableness to John Henry was sheer waste. "But you can't make a girl like a young fellow when she doesn't."

"It doesn't matter to me whether she likes him or not. All I want is—"

"What *do* you want?"

"To get rid of her!"

There was such spleen in the words that Louellen turned to silence as the best answer. It seemed worse than useless to say anything more, it would only provoke and drive him further.

"And you're not to meddle, Louellen—hear me? I won't have it. You've always set yourself against me, interfered and connived. But this time I won't have it. That girl's got to be disciplined—disciplined. She'll do as I say,—she's possessed of a froward and contentious spirit, and it's got to be broke."

"Judy was right—he's making her do this specially because he knows she hates it so," flashed through Louellen's mind, watching him darken with brooding menace. She was beating against stone walls. Heretofore, despite John Henry's violence and bluster, she could drive him back, but now—no.

But it might be only a fit of temper. This was a quieting

thought, and with it came her decision to let the matter rest, for if she went on he would only be further inflamed, perhaps do something unpremeditatedly cruel to Judy. She left him without another word. There was nothing to do but wait and see . . . wait and see. . . . She shook her head in a sort of dumb negation. She too, like Mart, saw troubling vistas. Like him, she was reluctant to tear up dead tissue and find live nerves beneath. She did not want, ever again, to feel emotion that she could not put aside. She was used to the cold and arid conflict of wills in small matters between herself and John Henry, but this was something which presaged more, perhaps another hideous long-drawn mêlée like those of their younger days. She did not feel the force, the will, to undertake it. If there was only some one to help her through, some one to steady and strengthen her. Annie and Hance? No—they were too far away. Her searching thoughts wheeled slowly, painfully round her known and knowing circle.

She tried to reassure herself. Possibly John Henry would recover from his obstinacy, and modify his course. He had done so before. But this time . . . she could not be sure. Strange, to have the ground, so long solid beneath her feet, suddenly shake into an open crevasse. Ah—had it been insecure all the time? She knew it had, she knew it had. Yet now the peril had befallen, she was conscious of how much she had dreaded it, how she had willed that it should not befall. Security had been cut away from her by the sharpness of John Henry's malignity.

She could hear Virgie and Judy in the sitting room, at the organ. Virgie was playing last Sunday's hymns with the dragging mechanical emphasis with which they were sung by the congregation. Judy began to sing, softly, a little thread of sweetness turning the monotonous chords of the player to harmony. Bud's voice joined in presently, humming an incorrect bass, careless and rough, but all shot through with youth, youth, crystalline, closed to all but itself. Louellen, listening, looked back at her own youth

as to a green hill, far away, for it was of that they sang. And at last she could not bear it.

"Judy," she called, "come here, I want you."

When Judy came she said: "We'll go along out and shut up the little chickens." Together they went out into the night, a night of stars, softly dark yet softly luminous, so that it was not hard to see their way, and the trees and shrubs were clear dark shadows, alive and friendly in the night air.

"Walk in the path, it's dewy," cautioned Louellen, and drew Judy nearer to her to keep her from the touch of the grass all silver-fringed with the night's distillation. Judy caught her mother's hand, and they made their way down toward the huddle of chicken coops, with sharp gables for all the world like miniature houses, that stretched beside the wagon sheds.

"I spoke to your Pa, Judy, about Mr. Calloway," she said at last, "but I didn't get much satisfaction. For some reason or other he's taken a fancy to him, and—well, I don't want you to deceive your Pa exactly, but if you could not make it quite so plain how much you don't like the young man, it'd be better all round. Likely if you do your Pa'll kind of forget about it after a while, and it'll all blow over. And you'll likely have other young men coming round. It's easy to get rid of one when there's several."

It sounded possible, thus artfully placed before her, and Judy naturally was a docile child. Being feminine, living under the shadow of arbitrary masculine authority, she was used to various ways of evading it while seeming to acquiesce. And if other, nicer young men came round. . . . Still . . . Ed Calloway . . .

"Mother, I just hate Ed Calloway. I don't want to pretend to be nice to him. Not even for a little while."

"I know you don't want to, Judy, but Mother thinks it's best. And I'll keep a close watch on you, and be right beside you. It can't do any harm to try it."

Judy sighed with impatience. On a night like this, with

the whip-poor-wills calling, and the scent of flowers blowing from the garden, the image of Ed Calloway must obtrude itself, and she to be nicer to him! This was a night for dreams, for beauty, for all far-away unattainable lovely things.

"I don't want to." But she was yielding.

"I know you don't. But you'll do it, anyway."

"Yes'm. I don't have to be very nice, do I?"

"No, just polite—like you'd be to anybody."

Louellen was relieved. She felt that the situation was robbed of its tensity. John Henry, without opposition, would find his bluster nullified, exploded. Judy's deception would be harmless enough. There would be no need anywhere for drama and scenes, no raking up of perished wrongs and fancied rights. They could all keep on in their same even dull groove, and that was what Louellen desired more than anything.

"I think I'll sit here on the side porch awhile," said Judy listlessly, as they returned to the house. "It's so nice out this evening."

"All right—a little while—but remember it's real damp."

She sat still, perched on the porch rail sidewise, looking at the stars, subdued, restless, desolate of heart, discovering what a mixed and miserable thing life is. She did not hear the sound of steps, but presently some one whispered her name through the night, cautiously, not to alarm her.

"Judy—Judy! It's me—Lee Kemp."

He stood in the darkness looking at her anxiously. Even in the night she could see his eyes bent on her with anxiety, solicitude for her. "I couldn't stay in the house, and I come on over here to see you. I was thinking about you," he went on, drawing nearer.

"I'm all right," she whispered back, carefully. "I'm glad you come."

He drew nearer, cautiously, sat on the edge of the porch below her, at one side, well out of the sharp segment of lamp-light that came from the open door. His silent com-

panionship was soothing to her restlessness, comforting to her distress.

After a while he whispered again: "Come boat-riding Sunday?"

"I will if I can."

"If we'd go up the creek a ways there's a place with a lot of dandy pond lilies. I found it the other day. We can get some."

The magic of silence in companionship held them again.

"It's such a pretty night," she whispered at last.

"Oh, yes." Then, after a little, with pride: "Mr. Bladen lets me go riding with him most every night. To-night Doc Tithelow and a coupla others're over there playing cards."

"I wish I could ride."

"Oh, shucks—no girls rides round here except that Krossey girl from Two Johns, and folks think she's touched in the head."

"I don't care, I'd like to."

"Well, it's fine. Mr. Bladen lets me take one of his best horses, one he rides himself sometimes."

"Unc' Mart's *good*." She hugged to herself the thought of Unc' Mart, gracious and generous to all the world, but with a special tenderness for her, Judy. She wasn't alone in the world. Unc' Mart was always fond of her. And now Lee. . . . She was glad Lee had come, more than glad. In the dark he looked as tall and broad as a man grown, and his hair was a thick cap of darkness, with his dark eyes beneath, catching points of light.

"Your honey suck' must be in bloom—I keep smelling something sweet."

"Yes, it's down on the arbor."

After a little while he got up, noiselessly. "I better go. Your folks wouldn't like it to have me hanging round here."

"Well, I like it," she assured him.

He dropped his hand to the porch railing and inadvertently it fell on hers, and for a moment their two hands lay cupped together, warm, tingling, shy. "Good night,"

he whispered. "Don't forget about Sunday." And was gone in the darkness.

In the darkness Judy raised the hand he had touched and put it against her cheek. And almost on the instant her mother's voice, unaware, summoned her within.

CHAPTER SIX

"You're a little spitfire, you know," said Young Ed Calloway. "I don't know where you get so much darned freshness. But it suits me pretty well."

It was a Sunday afternoon, late midsummer, burning with heat. Judy, in her white organdie, sat wearily in the shade of the twin maples in front of the house, where they had dragged chairs hoping to find some scrap of air or coolness there.

She was wishing with all her heart that Young Ed would go, and let her run away to the river and to Lee. But there he sat, stuffy from eating too much of the excellent dinner Mammy Rachel had reluctantly put before him, red from the heat, sweat standing on his forehead, his hair shining and oily, altogether a distasteful thing to look at. He came almost every Sunday afternoon now, and Judy, keeping her word to her mother, treated him with toleration which he construed for interest.

Her forced kindness had averted the conflict with John Henry, though perhaps it had disappointed him a little too. He wanted to make her obey him, he wanted the pleasure of coercing her, and seeing her bend and perhaps break under the weight of his compulsion. Her seeming acquiescence left him no chance for this, but he watched her hatefully to detect the least sign of dismay or intolerance.

But Judy was learning guile. She went buggy-riding with Young Ed, she talked with him when he came, she accepted his attentions at the church festival where he bought ice-cream for her and sat beside her while she ate it, and then assuming that his expenditure entitled him to some privilege, remained at her elbow for the rest of the evening, completely spoiling it for her. She slipped away from him for an hour on the pretext of helping to wash

ice-cream saucers with the elder women of the church, preferring soapsuds to her swain.

But she did not find it quite so hard to endure him for another reason than doing as her mother wished. She had a secret refuge in her friendship for Lee Kemp. Young Ed's distasteful jocularities could be passed over, almost forgotten, if she could slip away, now and then, and meet the tall dark boy and talk with him in desultory calm companionship, assuaging his loneliness with her own. To be sure the hours with Young Ed still irked her, and made her wonder consumedly what pleasure there was in having a beau who was just that,—a beau, and nothing more, not a friend, not a playfellow, uncongenial, unsympathetic at every point. His teasing seemed to her always the last word in flatness.

"I don't think I'm a spitfire," she answered gravely to his accusation. It seemed to be necessary to answer something. "I've got a better temper than you have."

"There—what did I say. You're a regular spitfire, telling me I've got a temper."

"You have. You've got a bad temper. I've seen you whip your horses too much not to know that."

"My grandfather says,

'A woman, a horse and a walnut tree—
The more you flog 'em, the better they be,'"

he misquoted lazily.

"It's a silly thing to say. How could you beat a walnut tree?"

"You know a lot about what's silly and what's not, don't you?"

"I know when people are silly." Oh, why did she have to sit there and talk this absolute drivel when down at the river. . . . She tried to still the devil of impatience in her breast. Why did every one always go off and leave them alone together? It was all right for Virgie and Mr. Todd, they liked it. But she hated it.

"I'm not going to fuss with you, though you look mighty pretty when you're mad. I was going to tell you about the tournament."

"Is there going to be another tournament? When?" A tournament was something she did not need to pretend interest in.

"Oh, long in the fall when it gets cool. I thought maybe I'd ride, if you was going to be there."

"Pa wouldn't let Virgie and me go to the last tournament because it was held by the Catholics—but lots of other people went—other church people, I mean."

"I reckon your Pa'd let you go if I asked him, wouldn't he?"

"Maybe he would," she said, knowing full well that he would.

"If I should win the prize maybe you'd enjoy being crowned the Queen, huh? Put some of the older girls' noses out of joint to have a pretty little thing like you come along and carry off the honors. It'd all be written up in the county paper, too."

"Better wait till you get the prize before you talk about that," offered Judy, ironically.

"I can't make you out. You never give a fellow any encouragement. Maybe that's why I'm so crazy about you." He recognized the eternal truth that the man male prefers to be the pursuer, not the pursued.

"If you ride, what name would you take?" asked Judy, evading the vexed question of encouragement, which she had heard before.

"I don't know. Anything to suggest?"

"Let's see—what's your farm named? It's Oak Hill, isn't it? Why don't you call yourself Knight of Oak Hill?"

"I'd kind of like something more fancy."

She came out with the brutal truth: "I think you'd be funny with a fancy name."

His red face became redder, suffused with anger at the

sting. "Much obliged for your very complimentary remark."

Judy was not sorry to have annoyed him. Perhaps now he would go. "Oh, you're welcome," she returned, casually.

He choked back his resentment. "Maybe Knight of Oak Hill would be the best. What's your Pa's place called?"

"It hasn't got any name. I wish it had. Unc' Mart Bladen's place is named 'Plaindealing.' Isn't that nice? His great-great-great—I don't know how many great-grandfathers named it so. And the old Salisbury place is named 'Hab-nab-at-a-Venture,' from the very first grant. I wonder how they ever got such names?"

"Your Grandpa West's old place was part of 'Liden's Venture' tract, and there's another farm down the county called 'Liden's Folly.' I don't think it was the same Liden."

Her interest in the names of farms vanished. She wished he would go, oh, how she wished he would go! "Isn't it hot?" she said. "It gives me kind of a headache."

"How'd you like it if I was to hitch up and we'd take a little spin?"

"In this dust and heat? It'd be awful. And your poor horse'd die."

"You think a lot more about my horse than you do of me."

A barbed speech quivered on the tip of Judy's tongue, but she restrained it. "Are you going to practice up for the tournament?" she asked languidly.

"You bet you. I'm going to rig up a pole-and-ring down in the pasture and get me a lance and ride there every evening. I'll be able to pick off the rings with my eyes shut in a couple weeks. You unde'stand I'm going to take you to the tournament."

What little pig eyes he had! Pig's eyes or toad's eyes, she couldn't decide which. "If Pa lets me go," she made proviso, hoping fervently that he wouldn't.

The weary hour wore away and the fingers of shade crept slowly, slowly, lengthening dreamily, almost imper-

ceptibly, and the maple leaves began to whisper faintly of the coming evening, softly, turning here and there a silver leaf-palm to beg for the cool relief of its coming. Judy yawned, once, twice. "It's the heat," she said, and let her eyelids droop. Young Ed was not proof against such signs of drowsiness. At last he went to the barn and hitched up his horse and drove away.

Instantly Judy's drowsiness left her. She ran upstairs, slipped into her blue calico day dress, hurried down the back way, snatching her kitchen sunbonnet as she went. Mammy Rachel, sitting in somnolent leisure on the back doorstep, watched her go.

"Don' you stay too late," she cautioned her. "Yo' Pa's gotter nose sha'p as er houn' dawg fo' smellin' trouble. Ef he come atter me, wheah I gwine say you is?"

"You make up something," said Judy, laughing. "He don't mind if I just go out for a walk around."

"Walk eroun'," grumbled Rachel, left to herself. "Walk eroun' soun' like nuffin' tall."

She ran through the heat, she did not feel it, but she was scarlet with exhaustion and dripping sweat when she reached the river-bank. Lee, his troubled face clearing magically, was waiting by the moored boat. "I'd about given you up," he said, "but I thought I'd wait till sundown."

Judy made a weary gesture of disgust. "It's that Ed Calloway. He came home with us from church and he's been hanging round ever since, sitting there, like a bump on a log, till I could've screamed."

She dropped into the boat, and Lee took the oars.

"I wish you didn't have to be bothered with him," said Lee. "It makes me so mad I can hardly stand it, thinking of you—with him."

"It makes me mad, too. Him and his old tournaments! A lot I care about it!"

"Tournaments—is there going to be a tournament?"

She told him all that Young Ed had said of it and he listened with excited attention. "I wish I had a horse," he

said at last. "My, I'd like to ride in a tournament with a lance and everything."

"Ask Unc' Mart for a horse."

"I don't ask any favors of anybody—not even of him."

"You're too proud."

"I'd rather be too proud than not proud enough."

The remembered annoyance of Young Ed's stay had vanished and she was cooler, fanning herself with her sunbonnet. There was a little drift of air along the water to help her. "You're touchy, too," she persisted, with a sparkle of teasing.

He was serious, disregarding her. A bitter suspicion was in his mind. "Did Ed Calloway say he'd crown you Queen if he won?"

"He won't win—what's the use of talking about it?"

"But did he say so?" Manhood was coming to him swiftly under the spur of jealousy, the boy in him was dying.

Judy felt the change, responded to it by a spurt of shyness.

"He did say something about it—but it's not likely Pa'll even let me go. And if I did go, Ed wouldn't win. He don't ride so good."

"But he's got good horses. And he'll be practicing up. Oh, Judy—look here—I'm nothing—I'm nobody—now—I'm like the dirt under your feet, but if—but if—" He stuttered, faltered, not knowing how to go about this avowal, drawn from him unawares. He could not say it, he did not know how to say it, and so—the words changed, changed to a lesser import, in themselves, but not to a lesser import in the saying.

"—if I—if I should somehow—get a horse—and ride in that tournament—and you—and you should be there—and I should win the most rings—would you—would you let me crown you the Queen, there before all of 'em?"

Judy was not aware of the change in him. She had not changed, she was still the child, frank, untroubled by any

stirring of dim organic memories. "Of course I would. Why not? And what do you want to talk that queer way for? Dirt under my feet! If I said that to you you'd be raving."

He was resolved, relieved somehow, by her unawareness, her plain speech. He did not answer her, nor did he speak to her again of the tournament. But it filled his heart with resolution. He would place himself, clearly, honestly before the world as a youth of dash and gallantry, able to compete with other youth, and not just Joe Kemp's boy, almost a pariah, almost as low down as a poor-white. He saw himself thus, winning, with people whispering about him, smiling with kindness and understanding. He saw himself with the prize, the crown, striding triumphantly before all the gazing eyes, and bringing it to Judy, offering it with a fine gesture. Not for nothing had he pored over Walter Scott.

"It'll be kind of like 'Ivanhoe,' " he said aloud, glowing, to Judy, not answering her words.

"D'you think you can get a horse somewheres?"

"I got to get one," he answered briefly.

"You going to ask Unc' Mart, after all?" she teased.

"Oh, I don't know. I don't see how I can."

"Well, while you're thinking about it, you'd better row back. I certainly have got to get home—look at the shadows. If I'm not there for supper—"

As she stepped out of the boat he reminded her: "You promised that—you know—"

"What did I promise?"

"You promised—if I won—you'd let me crown you the Queen."

"Oh that. Yes, of course I promised."

"Well,—I'm going to do it. I'll make Ed Calloway look like a monkey on a stick."

"Don't you make too many brags beforehand," she warned him. But he knew she wanted him to win.

But he was in a corner. He had no horse,—he had no

remote chance of getting a horse, and he would not put his case before Mart, for the pride about which Judy had twitted him choked him silent. He could not, in all honor, even practice tournament riding with any of Mart's horses, without telling him. And yet—he must, he must ride in that tournament. He must win it. He must crown Judy the Queen, there before them all, triumphantly. If he could only do this, he saw his future established and the disesteem of his father, the reproachful shiftlessness of his family, wiped out. He would have shown his mettle, conclusively. His imagination ran riot in strange secret ignorant ways, knowing so little of the motives that actuate the average mass of men and women, confident that with this one show and display of himself as conqueror, he must win all public esteem. No more hateful antagonistic looks from John Henry Hyde, and others of his ilk. No more half-pitying, half-patronizing asides from his father's old cronies: "That's Joe Kemp's boy—ain't he like?" No more—and here he touched the peak of his desire—seeing Judy in secret, hidden ways. No, he could be open, he could dispossess Ed Calloway, he could—he could—he must not dream farther, or more particularly. Only, in whatever future he would win, Judy must share.

All this, he reminded himself presently, got him no horse. There was not an available animal anywhere on his horizon. A good horse—one that would do him credit, would cost a hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars, perhaps more. The sum was infinitely beyond him. Even if he had a horse, he had no place to stable it, and its feed would have to be bought. He was so solitary, so full of young touchy pride that there was no one to whom he could turn to ask a favor like this, except Mart, and his very idolatry for the older man kept him from doing it. Mart Bladen had done enough for him, more than he had ever expected or hoped for. He would not ask him for the least thing.

The difficulty was presently resolved by Mart himself,

very simply. He did not guess Lee's secret preoccupation, but he did hear of the tournament and one night, when he and the boy had gone to ride together, he spoke of it.

"It's going to be quite a splurge, they say. Wish I was younger—I'd take Chloe here and show my dust to every man Jack of 'em. What say, now, Lee, you practice up a while with Florrie, and enter? Would you like to?" He had spoken with careless, generous kindness, unaware of how the boy's whole soul was centered on just this one thing. Lee's silence perplexed him. "Don't do it if you'd rather not—but I thought, maybe, it'd be kind of fun for you. And I know I can trust you to look after Florrie."

Tons of weight were lifting from Lee's heart, and his throat was choked with a lump as big as his fist. His voice shook with fervor. "I'd rather do it than anything in the world, Mr. Bladen. I'll never be able to thank you—I'll take such care of Florrie—"

"Why, I know you will," said Mart, surprised and a little troubled by the boy's agitation. "Why in time didn't you tell me you wanted to enter, you young scoundrel? You knew I'd let you have a horse, didn't you?"

"I didn't like to ask."

"I supposed you thought more of me than that. But you take Florrie, anyway, and rig up a ring-pole somewhere on the place, or maybe two or three of 'em, and I'll give you some fine points about tournament riding. You can take some old harness rings, and a good straight hickory for a lance—" Mart went on elaborating the preparations, his own anticipation and excitement growing as he talked. It would be as much fun for him as for the boy. It would be great!

And in the dark beside him Lee rode, not trying to listen, and not daring to lift his hand to wipe off the tears that were running down his cheeks. He could not let Mart know that he was crying—he was not sure himself what he was crying about. All that he knew was that a miracle had happened, and that he was the happiest boy alive.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was a hot, late summer, humid, yet parchingly dry. All the wetness of the days was this wet, sticky, oppressive heat, that mocked the parched earth, scorched the grass and leaves, brought suffering and leanness to beasts and frayed and fretted the nerves, depleted the strength of human beings.

This stifling, reeking heat, this succession of sweating, breathless days, piled up still farther, deepened the darkness of the cloud on the mind of John Henry Hyde. His severity increased, and his unreason.

He worked his field hands so viciously that two of them left, in the night, as negro workers often do, feeling that they can never successfully oppose their wills against a white man, but must evade him to escape his will. So, being short of labor, he worked himself each day to the point of exhaustion. He would come in at night staggering, weak, but borne on by his fanatical will, his brows knitted into their line of wrath, his burning restless eyes seeking offense. He would sit silent, too tired to speak, until his strength was a little recruited, and then he was ready to lash out—at Louellen, at Mammy Rachel, occasionally at Virgie and Bud, but most often at Judy. And at his lengthy ceremonial of family prayers he would pray bitterly and humiliatingly for her froward and contumacious spirit, until she was reduced to stinging tears.

One by one he deprived her, with particularity, of each thing that he knew gave her pleasure.

"You're not to go over to Mart Bladen's any more," he told her bitingly. "You're too big a girl to go running into the house of a man of Mart's loose character. And you're not to run out to the road to speak to him as he goes by. Nor take presents from him."

"But why—why?" asked Judy. "You always used to let me."

"Because I say not, that's why, and that's sufficient reason. He's a man of well-known bad character, and he's harboring that son of Joe Kemp's, the worst rip and drunk ever lived in this county. I know very well that nothing'd suit you better than to collogue with just such riff-raff. But you're not going to do it."

Judy dared not answer him further. John Henry's allusion to Lee Kemp filled her with confusion—perhaps he had guessed in some uncanny fashion that she knew the boy. But no,—if he had known that, further execration would have been her portion, perhaps some sort of cunningly devised punishment.

Another perpetual complaint he had against her was her laughter. She had always stilled it in his presence, but now she checked her mirth, always so easy to come, so light, so gay, when there was not the slightest chance that he might be within earshot.

"The crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool," he quoted at her, hearing her, and alluded in his prayers that night to her lightness and vanity, signposts on the way to perdition.

Virgie and Bud sympathized, but that was no ease to her. Louellen, to whom she turned in passionate resentment, urged her to be quiet, and patient. "Your Pa's all overwrought with the trouble he's been having with the drought, and the crops drying up," she said. "He's not himself. But if you don't say anything he'll come around presently."

"I wish I could go away," wept Judy. "I wish I could go away and never come back. Send me out to California to Aunt Annie, won't you, Mother? Write and ask her if I can't come stay out there with her till Pa gets over his spite at me."

"Your Pa would never let you go. And I haven't got the money myself. I wisht I had. I believe to my soul I would send you."

"I don't see why I have to stay here and stand it."

Louellen was thinking of the money that had been hers, and how she had given it over into John Henry's eager hands as part of the price of her deliverance from his desires. Now she wondered if it had not been better to have lived with him again, better to have yielded to him, than to be penniless when her need was so great for Judy. Oh, to have that money, even a little of it! The driblets of egg-and-butter money she obtained vanished as quickly as they accumulated, in clothes for herself and the two girls, in linen for the house, and small things for the kitchen, curtains and the like. John Henry's avarice would not have tolerated that she save anything substantial from this source. She thought of writing to Annie, and telling her need—but that was impossible. The self-contained spirit of the Wests forbade it, save as a last resort. Besides, she owned it to herself, she wanted Judy near her. She wanted Judy, her baby, her own. . . .

"Hard words break no bones, Judy," she said, crisply. "You must just think of your Pa as a sick man and not responsible for what he says, and forget about it. And try not to provoke him any more than you can."

"His hard words hurt me as much as if he broke my bones," Judy returned resentfully. "I'm afraid to breathe when he's in the house. The only times he treats me half way decent is when Ed Calloway's here, and I'd rather he'd be mean than have that old toad hanging round."

"Well, try and be as careful as you can."

"I am careful. I try not to do a thing. But it don't make any difference—he prays for me just as mean. Mother, I just wish I had a chance to pray for him some time—out loud. Wouldn't I read his title clear? Oh, my!"

"You *mustn't* talk that way about him. It's wrong—it's sinful."

Judy shrugged her shoulders unconvinced. This was a queer world she had reached, this grown-up land, where you had to have hateful beaux hanging round, and where

your own father took a hard spite on you, and made your life miserable. But it was plain that she would receive only negative consolation from her mother.

In Mammy Rachel, however, she had an open champion. To that ample bosom Judy could fly, sure of a refuge and unstinted sympathy. The old woman had never liked John Henry. She had come to Louellen only because Annie had gone so far away, and her loyalty demanded that she should serve a West. Between her and the master of the house there had always been an unspoken antipathy, expressed, on Rachel's part, by a disregard of his tastes and wishes wherever possible, by neglect of and indirect disobedience to all his orders. All this is the habitual negro way of showing dislike for those in authority over them, and only Rachel's excellence as a servant, and the fact that her wages were low, prevented John Henry from driving her out of his house. She made him uneasy, she had a moral superiority over him that he would never acknowledge, but which he felt. She did not respect him, and he knew it. She could film her eyes, gypsy fashion, and give him a blank stare when he scolded her that made him feel his inadequacy before her. It had been so from the first day she came, and now she eagerly welcomed the chance to take Judy's part, to comfort and sustain her.

"Nemmine, my lammie, nemmine," she told her. "Happy times on dey way to you, sho's yo' bo'n. Trouble fus', do. My lef' eye been ertwitchin' en ertwitchin', en dat a sho' sign er trouble on de way. But tain' gwine las'—dat sho' en certain."

She gave Judy plain counsel, too, as to Ed Calloway. "Ef he try puttin' his han's on you, my honey, you haul off en blam him in de face, good en plenty. Doan you let him hug you up ner kiss you, ner tek a holt er yo' han's. Dem Calloways ain' no good blood, en he ain' gwine tech my lamb, dat he ain'. Ef he try any his fresh ways wid you, you knock him erway, en use yo' finger nails on him ef he tries ter keep on. Yo' heah me, chile?"

"He did try to hold onto my hand," confessed Judy, "but I pulled it away from him. He makes me sick. Oh, if Pa just wouldn't ask him here to dinner all the time!"

"I'd like ter put groun' glass in his biscuit," grumbled Rachel. "Back in slave times my mammy tole me erbout a ooman took a pizen hate on her marster, en she bake him up a lil cake, all full er nuts en raisins, wid fine groun' glass in it, en he die en nobody neveh did fine out whut ail 'im. All de cullud folks, dey know."

"Oh, that was awful! She committed murder. She might have been hung."

Rachel nodded a sibylline head, smiling faintly. "Lots er things go on in slave times dat nobody ain' know about, honey. Bad things. Yes, ma'am, an' I'll tell you who dat ole man was—he uz ole Billy Calloway's fadder—dishyer go-lightly Young Ed's grea'-gran'pa, dat who."

Beyond these dark revelations, Mammy Rachel was of practical help. If John Henry sent Judy supperless to her room, Rachel smuggled up food to her, instantly and surely. When he forbade her to go again to Mart Bladen's, Rachel instituted herself as scout and spy.

"You go, honey, you go erlong," she said. "I'll keep watch en ward ovah you. Yo' Pa a sly ole fox, but he ain' so sly ez Rachel."

"But if he finds out he might send you off," demurred Judy. "I don't want you to run risks for me."

Rachel laughed joyfully, welcoming contention with John Henry.

"Yo' Pa ain' gwine sen' me off, neveh, no time, nohow," she said. "I lak ter see him try it, dass all."

"Well, I'm just going this once—to tell Unc' Mart what Pa said. I think it's only right to do it. I wouldn't want Unc' Mart to think I didn't love him any more and was acting offish on my own will."

So when John Henry was making one of his regular trips to the newly established creamery, she took the short cut across the fields between the two farms. It was not

much used, this path—briers clutched her calico skirt, and she had to put up a warding hand to keep the crowding sassafras and pokeberry from her face. There was a patch of clay where the path dipped into a gully and this she edged round carefully, balancing on grass hummocks and stones. Presently she reached the boundary line, scaled the fence, and dropped down into Mart Bladen's orchard, where the twisting half-obliterated path led her through, and out again, near the stables. She could hear some one whistling, and knew Mart's favorite tune:

"Hi, Betty Martin, tiptoe, tiptoe—"

The familiar lilt of it, her own forlornity, sent her in to him at a run, eager to be with some one warm and living and responsive. He was stooping over a feed bin when she caught him round the neck.

"Oh, Unc' Mart—dear and darling—I'm so glad to see you—"

Such fervent demonstration was unusual, but he straightened, beaming, and hugged her a welcome. "Why, you little rascal—how'd you sneak up on me? I ain't seen you for a month of Sundays. Lemme look at you. Hey, what's all this for?" For her eyes had filled with quick tears, their blueness deepening, darkening behind the withheld shower.

"I did sneak up, Unc' Mart. Pa says I'm not to come over here any more—that I'm not to run out to the road to hail you as you go by, that I'm not to let you bring me any candy—nothing."

"What's all this?" He put his arm around her, and they sat down together on the feed bin in the shadowy hayscented barn, a cave of coolness in the heat.

She repeated it, her head against his shoulder. She poured out all her woes. He listened, troubled, frowning, wondering. There was a dark, a menacing significance back and beneath this—he could not tell what.

"And what does your Ma say, honey?" he asked at last.

Judy told Louellen's warning. "And Unc' Mart, Mammy

Rachel's the only one who really takes my part. She's watching out for me now, so's I could come over here to see you. Oh, Unc' Mart, you know I think the world and all of you—I don't want not to see you. I think more of you than anybody there is, anywhere. You're awful dear to me, somehow, even if you aren't real blood-kin."

The arm about her trembled, tightened a little. "As God's my witness, Judy," said Mart Bladen, "you're dearer to me than everybody and anybody in this world. I want to see you happy. I want—oh, what's the use—my hands are tied. What can I do?"

"But I didn't expect you to do anything. I only came because I wanted you not to forget about me, even if I didn't see you so often. When Pa's away, safe away, you know, I'm coming sometimes. But maybe it might be long times in between—"

"No—I don't want you to, Judy. I want you to bide by what your Ma says. If she thinks you ought to do like—he says—then you do it. She's right there and she knows best."

He recalled his talk with Lee now two months past. "You been out boat-ridin' with Lee a good bit, ain't you, Judy?"

"Only now and again. It's so hard to get away from Pa. He's got eyes in the back of his head, and he can see pret' near a mile, seems to me."

"Then he don't know you been going?"

"Oh, my, no. If he did—well, he'd be crosser'n ever. He don't like Lee and he don't think you ought to keep him here. He's said that all round the neighborhood. That's one reason why he don't want me to come over here any more, because Lee's here."

Mart Bladen shook with his unuttered profanity. "But yet he sent you out buggy-riding with Young Ed Calloway." He spoke incautiously, though he was determined on caution. No use to set Judy against John Henry. It was hard enough for her as it was. And if Louellen had coun-

seled patience. . . . He wished life would not bewilder and entangle him so. He did not like it. He was in a smothering, uncertain region, with Judy clinging to him like a helpless kitten, soft and round-eyed and needful of his protection, and his hands—what had he said?—his hands tied—his head in a bag. God, what a mess!

"How old are you now, Judy?"

"I'll be sixteen my next birthday."

Sixteen—two years before she was of age. Meantime, tight in John Henry's paternal grasp. He knew the standing that John Henry had in the community. A man not liked, but respected for his rigid piety, his substance. The unruly daughter who went against a man like that would be wholly condemned. Mart struggled with the stiff problem of things as they seem and things as they are. Hard to tell in such case whether to do the right thing or the expedient, the politic. With Louellen, he chose the expedient. He hardly listened to what Judy was saying, explaining her dislike, her horror of Young Ed.

". . . I just despise him. I like Lee lots better." She finished.

"Lee ever come over to see you?" asked Mart, suspiciously.

"Why, no, Unc' Mart,—only once or twice when I was sitting out on the porch by myself of an evening. He knows Pa wouldn't like him to come over there, and he don't want to come where he's been talked down so. He's touchy. But sometimes he comes—because he's sorry for me. And we just sit there and don't say anything. But I like to have him come, even so."

"Hmm—yes. Well, now, look here, Judy, you better do like your mother says. I'll try to get along without you, though Lord knows I'll miss you. And when you're a little older, maybe happier times'll come. . . ."

"That's what Rachel says. She says they're bound to come. All is, I don't see how I'm going to stand Pa till they get here." Her frankness had no malice in it. It was

a plain question, a matter of endurance, and her eyes turned deep with tears again at the thought.

"Oh, land sake!" exclaimed Mart, getting up and stamping about. "We got to contrive something. Now there's that old holler oak tree out along the road, 'bout half-way betwixt my front gate and yours. I'll drop a bag of licorice or pep'mints in there every time I come from town, honey, and thataway you'll know I'm thinking about you. And you might stick me in a little note every so often, telling me the news. How about that? And I'll put a flea in Lee's ear not to come over to your house no more, since John Henry's so down on him. He's mighty taken up with practicing for the tournament—"

"Oh, Unc' Mart, you did loan him a horse?" She was radiant, her tears instantly dried. "He said he wouldn't ask you, you'd done so much for him already."

"That fool boy, all eat up with pride! Yes, I loaned him a horse, and he's riding every evening, down in the back pasture lot. But I think I'd a little ruther he didn't come over to your house. If John Henry found it out he might make out he come for some bad purpose, stealing or something."

"Then I'll put a note in the hollow oak for him, too, sometimes."

Mart looked crest-fallen. "Now you won't do any such a thing. That oak tree's our post office, yours and mine, and I won't have any young sprig cutting in on me."

"You're an old jealous."

"Maybe I am, maybe I am, miss. But you got to hunt up another holler tree if you want to leave any notes for Lee in 'em."

She stood on tiptoe to reach the height of his shoulders, with her hands clinging fondly about his neck. She held her lips for his kiss. "I got to go now—Pa might be back. Good-by, Unc' Mart, dear Unc' Mart, you old jealous. Don't forget the licorice."

"You little rascal—don't you fear. And no notes for Lee in my tree. You remember that."

Their good-by sparkled between tears and laughter, but when she had gone Mart Bladen sat disconsolately, humped over, on the feed box. For the first time he felt the encroaching finger of age upon his spirit, cold, unpitying. He must say nothing for Judy. He must do nothing for her. She was taken from him, cut away from him with ruthless malice, and he could not stir to prevent it.

"Looks like John Henry's got the best of me this time," he thought, drearily, "but what's he getting at, exactly, I wonder? Maybe he's going plumb doggoned crazy after all. God knows he never was none too well balanced. We'll have to wait and see . . . wait and see. I'd a heap ruther go right on over and wring his stringy neck. . . ." He clenched his fist with a satisfying tensity of muscle. But that too availed nothing. They must all leave things as they were. They must wait. He raged against this need of waiting. Was Judy's golden untouched youth to be marred—or wasted—or unfulfilled? No, no—he could not endure that. But still—again he felt his old unwillingness to be entangled with the tragic movement of life, to be impelled and forced by it, rather than to move serenely through the days, master of all his movements, his own will supreme, ruler of his own small cycle.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE boy, Lee, was a great solace. More and more Mart turned to him, made him a companion, a son. He had never been drawn to the broods of his sisters, they resembled too much his brothers-in-law, and that is always a sure means of family alienation. It is the child that bears the stamp of our own blood to whom we are instinctively drawn, in whom we recognize points of superiority. And among the children of Mart's two sisters there was not one who carried the Bladen look, the Bladen laughter.

But Lee, though he was dark, though he was silent, and apt to be serious to moroseness, had a kinship for Mart in his way with the farmhands, his way with the land, his way with the horses and his love for Cæsar. More, there was his humble, unselfish, unasking devotion—a devotion that would have brought response from one far less responsive than Mart. Mart turned to that devotion, began to lean on it.

To the men with whom he drank and played seven-up, he swore that he liked that boy of Joe Kemp's, that he had first-rate stuff in him, that maybe he was a throw-back, or got changed in the cradle, but that he hadn't an ounce of his father's wildness, the Kemp shiftlessness. He told stories of his cleverness, his handy ways, his energy and ability. Gradually, as in anything a little out of the ordinary brought to their attention, the community began to look with interest and kindliness on young Lee. Occasionally some one would wag a dismal "Blood will tell" in answer to favorable comment, but for the most part, save among the strict sabbatarians who regarded Mart himself as a soul past redemption, a sinner incarnate, the boy gained a certain standing.

Now and then an older man, some one of Mart's friends,

would stop him, and engage him in friendly aimless talk for a moment or two, and Miss Becca Simpson, meeting him on the street of Manor where he had gone on an errand, seized his hand and shook it with vivacity.

"You Lee Kemp, aint you?" she demanded, her little black eyes peering at him brightly. "I thought I knew you. You're getting to be a man grown, and a right fine-looking one, too. How's Mart Bladen getting along? You tell him he's to come in and see me next time he comes to town, or I'll be downright mad at him."

Lee delivered the message word for word, and did not try to conceal his gratification of being spoken to by so notable a personage as Miss Becca. "She was real nice," he added. "Funny-looking, but nice."

With the tide of public favor set in his direction he felt no bashfulness in entering his name for the tournament, dated now for a Saturday early in October. He, too, like Young Ed, had been in a quandary as to what name he should ride under, for every youth taking part adopted for the occasion a fanciful title.

"Why don't you call yourself 'Knight of Plaindealing'?" asked Mart, at last. "I always used to ride under that name."

"You don't mind, Mr. Bladen—my using the name of your farm?"

"Of course not. Where you get all these hifaluting ideas beats me—anybody might think, to hear you talk, I didn't have no interest in you. But you don't need to use that name less'n you want to. Now there was your great-grandpa, up the county, he had a place called 'Come-by-Chance'—you might go back to him and use that name. He was a fine, high-stepping old feller, the old folks used to say."

"I think 'Knight of Come-by-Chance' sounds too true," said young Lee grimly, after thought. "I'm too much a come-by-chance myself. Not that I mean any disrespect to my great-grandpa, but—I don't want folks to laugh at

me. I'd a lot ruther"— he hesitated, coloring, choking with the love he had for Mart, which it would be unmanly to reveal—"I'd a lot ruther call myself 'Knight of Plain-dealing' than *anything,* Mr. Bladen, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead and do it then, and quit this hemming and hawing."

But beneath Mart's brusqueness was deep satisfaction and Lee felt it and was warmed by it.

He had practiced faithfully for the tournament. With Ephum's help he had set up two posts, with an arm on one side, making great inverted L's. On the tip of the arm was the fork which held the ring, which the riding knight must pick off with his lance while his horse is at full gallop. There would be three of these posts in the real tournament, set some seventy feet apart.

The knights would wear wide ribbons in their favored colors, passed from shoulder to hip, and tied jauntily, and it was the custom to wear also a wide felt hat, turned up at the side, and decorated with a long plume, ravished from the headgear of a complacent female relative, and sewed there by her hands. For the rest, ordinary clothes sufficed, —there was not enough of the assured fantastic in the temperament of the local youth to countenance further decoration.

Lee was at a loss how to obtain the requisite feather, unless he went direct to Miss Stafford's Millinery Emporium and bought it, and such a proceeding was against all tradition, both romantic and financial. Mart saw his quandary and forestalled him.

"Now about a feather for your hat," he said, one evening, after watching Lee and Florrie in their regular joust after the small elusive rings. "You leave that to me. I'll go round to Mrs. Dan Fisher's—Rena Massey that was—and borrow you the grandest plume in the state. That woman's got more folderols and gee-gaws and rigamajigs than any other ten women in town put together. She'll loan me one and glad to do it."

It was as he had said. Rena, expanded into a permanent stoutness that did not prevent her good-nature, her coquettishness, and even some of her prettiness remaining, opened a bandbox of discarded trimmings, and banteringly offered Mart his choice of half a dozen feathers.

"If 'twas only for yourself, I'd say take the red one," she giggled, "or this bright yellow. Nothing was ever too gay for you, Mart."

"Yes, you'd like me to look like a nigger parade, I reckon. I tell you the young folks nowadays are all sobersides compared to what we were. Now—what do you think about that kind of roan-colored one?"

"That's not roan, silly—that's brown. Well,—that's a real pretty feather and a nice length."

"Sure you can spare it?"

"Anything to you."

"There you go, making me wish you was Dan Fisher's widow 'stead of his wife."

"Oh, you horrid thing to say such a thing about Dan."

"You brought it on yourself."

Rena's silver bangles clinked about her plump wrists as she wrapped the feather in soft paper. She was as keen for fashion as ever she had been, the additional surface she had acquired to display the styles did not displease her.

"Seen anything of your neighbors lately—Louellen—or any of the family?"

"Well, John Henry and I go to prayermeeting regular together, as usual."

"Mart, you're a case. 'Twouldn't hurt you to go to prayermeeting now and then. That reminds me—I hear Young Ed Calloway's setting up to little Judy, Louellen's youngest girl. I reckon John Henry'll be pleased, seeing how Young Ed's turned a new leaf and joined the church. My, he was a wild one, too."

"No," said Mart, reflectively. "He wasn't wild, Rena. He was dirty. There's a difference."

Rena's eyes brightened at the prospect of gossip. She

dropped her voice: "You mean—that shantyboat girl? Dan told me something about it."

"I didn't mean a thing,—I just said he was dirty, and I know it. That's all. Thank you for the feather, Rena. I'll bring it back when the tournament's over."

Again this business of Young Ed Calloway hanging around Judy! People were beginning to talk about it now. And she was nearly sixteen—but girls didn't marry as early as they used to. But what could he do? If he made a move he'd just put trouble on Judy and Louellen both. A man couldn't interfere with his neighbor's family affairs. That was as true now as it had been when Judy had come to tell him good-by. He realized that he had not been thinking so acutely of Judy since young Lee had made this coming tournament such an outstanding affair. He was vastly concerned that Lee should make a good showing. Indeed, he was sure the boy would win, though he did not tell him so.

Lee himself was confident, but fearful, too. Strategically he tried to conceal from Mart his anxiety, his dependence on this one day for all the status of his future. But he could not help building on it, seeing it the doorway to all he wished for, all he wanted. His hopes went up, up, up, knowing no limit to their flight. Only now and then was he troubled by the steadying dart of "What if I shouldn't win?" He must win—he must. He went to sleep at night with his pulses beating that refrain to him, and woke to the same rhythm. And all through his slumbers were great dreams of himself riding—riding—riding—fast and straight as no one had ever ridden before, snatching off the pendent rings with a debonair lightness, acclaimed by cheering crowds, and at the last bringing the golden crown that would be the guerdon of the queen, proudly, openly, to Judy's welcoming hands, her proud and wonderful smile! Always somewhere at the back Ed Calloway, a mean and defeated figure, slunk away into a limbo of obscurity whence he could never return. But he confided none of this dream pageant

to Mart—or even to Judy—in their now most infrequent meetings.

Only he reminded her that she had said he might crown her queen—if he won. And once, he almost betrayed himself and the height of his imaginings, his pyramided hopes, in an exclamation: "I'd never hold up my head again if I don't win. I'd be ready to clear out of the neighborhood, go off somewhere, and not come back till I was somebody folks couldn't talk down."

"Oh," cried Judy, startled. "Don't go away, Lee. Why, what would I do?"

He looked at her meaningly. "You could wait till I come back," he said. Then, desperately: "You wouldn't marry Ed Calloway, would you, Judy?"

"Mercy—no. I tell you I don't want *ever* to get married." She was thinking of the eternal conflict between her parents, the spectacle of her mother's dreary existence.

Lee let the matter rest. He had no right to say more. Anyway, she had promised she wouldn't marry Ed Calloway. And anyway . . . he was going to win the tournament. . . .

The tournament had been put off from early October until later because of the continued unseasonable heat, but items in the Manor *Democrat* kept it alive. Entries were coming in. George Willis would ride as Knight of Tuckahoe. Thomas Stevens would ride as Knight of Wye Mills. Church Hill had a representative, and two enterprising youths would come from Centerville to uphold the honor of Queen Anne County in feats of horsemanship. Later it was announced that Judge Markwood would deliver the Charge to the Knights, an occasion for flowery oratory. Cicero Smith of N. had donated the use of his trotting track for the occasion—as every one knew from the first he would. The editor of the *Democrat* urged attendance of the tournament "to encourage our young men in their quest of chivalry and to show how impossible it is that this much-vaunted new invention, the horseless car-

riage, can ever supersede, in usefulness or beauty, that favorite domestic animal, *equus caballus*. Let this be our challenge to the soulless inventor who would supplant our noble steeds with noisy, ill-smelling machines—let us show the everlasting glories of the horse and uphold the famous standards of Southern horsemanship in deeds of derring-do on Saturday P.M. at Smith's Race Track, while youth and beauty smile maidenly approval on the scene."

Young Ed Calloway read the notice to Judy, smiling with his own approval, tickled with the phrases.

"Your Pa's going to let you go," he added. "I asked him if I could take you. And I've persuaded Brother Todd to attend, because I heard the Episcopalian minister was going, and I didn't think the Methodists ought to be left unrepresented, officially, I mean. Two preachers will lend tone to the affair, and even if it is a trotting track, I don't see that it makes any difference. So the Reverend made up his mind to go, and he'll take Virgie. I told your Pa that, too."

"I'm glad Virgie's going," said Judy, ungratefully.

Young Ed did not notice the omission of her thanks. "I'm going to call myself Knight of Oak Hill, as you thought would be best,—maybe you noticed the name amongst the entries."

"Yes, I noticed it."

"And my little horse—why, he can pretty near take off the rings himself. I'll bet you I crown you Queen of Love and Beauty before 'em all."

"I wish you'd leave me alone," said Judy, provoked to sudden overwhelming, helpless anger. "I don't want to go to the old tournament, and I don't want you crowning me Queen either. I don't see what you come round here for anyway. You know I don't like you and don't want you. You ought to be ashamed to run after a girl who don't like you any better than I do."

"I like a spitfire, that's what," proclaimed young Ed. "I don't give a snap for a girl that's got no spirit, and comes

honeying round a fellow. Besides, you look awful pretty when you're mad—don't you know that? I expect you do, and that's why you get mad at me so much. You just whet up my appetite when you fly out at me, Judy. Besides, I know I got your Pa's blessing." He smiled teasingly, securely. More and more Judy's luscious youth appealed to him. He was beginning to think very surely now of marrying her. After the tournament—if he won—by crowning her Queen of Love and Beauty he would serve notice of his intentions publicly. No man crowned a girl in a tournament unless they were engaged or meant to be.

"I'll drive down here for you early Saturday afternoon, and we'll go right out to the trotting track. One of my hands is going to bring my riding horse in for me."

"I'll ride in town with Virgie and Mr. Todd," said Judy, seeking a way to escape. "Then you won't need to come all this way."

"I don't mind it. That nice long ride in town and back with you is the best part of my day, barring the time when I hand you the winner's prize." He swaggered away, assured that luck was with him, enjoying the sensation of Judy's futile rebelliousness. "She needs a snaffle, that's what," he told himself, and saw himself the man to apply it. A wife like that, a good girl,—"never a fellow before me,"—who spiced her beauty and her virginity with resistance would be something worth having in the way of women. Being so young, so inexperienced, he could soon break her to subserviency. More than ever he realized how wise he had been to cut away from his other associations, and join the church, to go in for peace by way of holiness. He had been skeptical about such benefits at first, but since he'd found Judy to play with, he saw, as never before, how well it pays to be good.

CHAPTER NINE

THE trotting track of Cicero Smith of N. was an informal and little used field, roughly laid out with a half-mile circular course; and further embellished by a few tumbling sheds for the horses, an unroofed ramshackle grandstand, and a judges' pagoda, not much larger or more important than a dirty gumdrop.

That was all there was of it, but it was happily located only a quarter of a mile or so from Manor, which made it easily accessible to the town, and those town bloods who wished to try their horses' speed. Occasionally minor races were held there, real races of a sort, preliminary to the larger races of the county fairs. But for the most part it was a desolate, deserted place, edged with scrubby pine, and a lesser close growth of beggar's lice, Spanish needle and the more potent, vigorous sand-burr.

Nevertheless it was a race track, and it could be used for tournaments, so the row of posts, three of them, were set up there, and a course agreed on and laid out—much devastation ensuing thereby to the summer's growth of rank weeds.

The entries had increased at a high pace. So much so it was deemed advisable to omit the usual preliminary "trial ride" of each contestant.

"Folks can't stay out here all night," quoth Cicero Smith of N., facetiously, who was master of ceremonies, and a jocund soul, delighting in his semi-public character. "We'll have to give the lads three rides each, and let it go at that."

It was so arranged. Cicero Smith would be one of the judges, and Doctor Tithelow another. Luther Gadd, the popular county clerk, a debonair middle-aged man whose twin appetites for sport and good living ate up his income to the last penny, without a care for the morrow, was the

third judge, and these three would see that all the requirements of speed and distance were carried out. A committee of ladies would take care to ravish the best of the town and country gardens for the late chrysanthemums and ornamental grasses to form special winners' trophies,—flat bouquets stiffly backed with green fans of arbor vitæ. There was high excitement when it was learned that the Ladies Guild of the Episcopalians proposed to set up a booth and serve hot coffee, sandwiches and fried oysters, for the benefit of their organization. A ripple of talk arose and the Methodist ladies suggested that their Ladies Aid should run an opposition booth, but in the end they decided against it. "It'll be a lot of work," quoth Miss Becca Simpson crisply. "Let the Episcopalians do it. They need the money worse'n we do. Besides, suppose it should rain and all that food had been fixed beforehand." The tag of that speech carried the decision.

But the day was clear, with a cool West wind, but a warm autumn sun to gild and glamour the dinginess of the racetrack, to fling a melting blue haze through the sparse pine woods about it, a day to lift the heart to laughter, to irresponsibility, a day subtly tuned to festivity. It would have been impossible to work on such a day.

The crowd gathered early. In the morning people rode over and drove over from Queen Anne and Kent Counties, up from Talbot, even from Dorchester. They hunted up old friends and distant relatives, and stayed to dinner, and those who had no claim on private hospitality ate bountifully at the hotel. The country people drove in, parked their buggies and surreys and dearborns at the racetrack, brought out huge baskets of lunch and enjoyed their dinner in the open. The enterprising Episcopalian ladies, anticipating this, were on the ground early with their booth to supplement such cold viands by their hot food and drink. Two colored women fried oysters over an open fire, in a huge kettle of fat, and a white-coated colored man served them, and with them beaten biscuit and huge tin cups of

coffee, while the President and Secretary of the Guild directed, assisted and received the money.

Early in the afternoon, as soon as the mid-day dinner was over, the townsfolk and their guests came trooping leisurely out to the track. Many of them drove and chose to watch the tournament from their vehicles rather than from the rickety heights of the grandstand. The younger faction, however, congregated on the grandstand and there was a distinct line of cleavage between town and country youth. The town girls, assured as to style and charm, chattered, visited round amongst their various groups, displaying an ostentatious sparkle and sociability, while the country girls gathered closely together and watched, half envious, half scorning. They would not have confessed that they longed to achieve the easy, voluble flutter and swing of the town girls, but their secret hearts were eaten with such longing.

The men mostly stayed down near the track, pretending indifference, talking desultorily of crops and local politics. Many of them went to join their women when the hour for the beginning of the tournament drew near, only the half-tamed spirits remaining in masculine solidarity.

Virgie and Judy, self-conscious in new dresses and hats, sat on the grandstand between the town and country factions, belonging to the country side by rights, but because of the companionship of the Reverend Todd feeling that they must acknowledge him as a town affiliation, for, as soon as Virgie and he were married, they would be townspeople. The Episcopalian minister, an urbane white-haired little old gentleman, sat with his wife and two daughters in the midst of the town crowd.

Mart Bladen had ridden in early, with Lee, and they had had dinner at the Hotel, and come out together to the track, keen-edged with excitement, but speaking little. Mart now and then ventured something confident, half-boastful, varied with superfluous words of caution as to horsemanship in a crowd, and the like. Lee hardly heard him. He was

centered, intent, his eyes glittered and his pulses pounded. He sat very straight in the saddle, and pulled his wide hat down to shadow his face, lest his eagerness be betrayed to the crowd. When it was time for him to join the riders Mart had managed an easy "Luck!" and left him. Then the older man had gone to the grandstand and presently spied Judy. A reconnoitering look told him that John Henry was not near, so he went over to them, spoke to the young minister, pinched Virgie's cheek, and settled his bulky weight beside Judy.

"If this plaguey plank seat holds," he told her, "I figure I'm as safe here as anywhere. Ain't it a nice day! Honey, you get that last little poke o' candy?"

"Oh, yes, Unc' Mart. My, they were so good. You get my note?"

"Yes, ma'am. Who brought you in? The young reverend?"

A shadow fell across Judy's face. "That Young Ed Calloway brought me. He's riding. He says he's going to win the prize and crown me queen. I don't wish anybody any bad luck, but, oh, if something should happen to him, I'd downright laugh, indeed I would."

"You rest easy about his crowning you. He's not got a chance in the world of winning. There's a dozen boys out there that's better with a horse than he is."

"Unc' Mart," she whispered, lest Virgie should hear. "D'you think Lee's going to win?"

"I figure he's got a right good chance," Mart returned cautiously. "But there's a heap of smart riders here today, from all around. Still, I figure Lee's got a chance. By jolly, I wish they'd start up."

Presently came a little restless wave of expectancy, a ripple of turned heads, and exclamations: "They're coming! They're coming!" And in the sunlight, at full gallop, the massed knights drove down the track in rough troop formation, pulling up their horses with a tremendous effect, while the crowd clapped and cheered. As the applause died

away Judge Markwood's massive figure rose in the front of the stand, frock-coated, heavy-jowled, deep-eyed, silver-haired. In orotund flowery periods he gave a short, ringing Charge to the Knights, while the restless horses sidled and danced and pawed the ground, resenting such close contact with so many strangers of their kind, and their riders had all they could do to keep them in hand, what with ribbons and plumed hats to manage as well.

Cicero Smith, Doctor Tithelow and Mr. Gadd took their places in the judges' stand. The riders galloped off to the end of the course to get their lances, and await their turns. A bell rang. The tournament had begun.

Oscar Gooden, the auctioneer, was the marshal and, in a voice of mighty power, he bawled out the name of the first rider.

"Jeems Aaron Harbison—Knight of Lloyd's Regulation."

Thundering down the line of gibbet-like posts came young Jeems Aaron, lying low on his horse's neck, his reins loose, guiding his steed with leg-pressure according to the best local precepts of riding, his lance a dart of determination, his plume a streaming, defiant pennon, his red sash a challenge. Jeems Aaron was good. He won every ring, and trotted back to the music of cheers.

"If all of 'em do as well as that they'll have to ride off a lot of ties at the end," said Mart, nervously. He was looking out for Lee, impatient until he should come. He was surprised to feel how hot and cold his hands were going.

Helpers ran out and put new rings in place. Again Oscar Gooden lifted his voice:

"Albert Stell—Knight of Cordova."

Albert was not so clever as his predecessor. He had to retire with only two rings dangling on his lance, and the work of the helpers was accordingly shortened.

Now they came fast. "Knight of Tuckahoe! Knight of Betterton! Knight of Goldsboro! Knight of Potters Landing!"

A waggish country lad brought a laugh by having himself announced "Knight of the Plow and Harrow," and rode a lumbering old farm-horse, whose clumsy gait sent the spectators into shouts of joy. Nevertheless, when the boy retired with two rings, he was cheered and clapped as none of his predecessors had been. He grinned his acknowledgment and ducked a roguish red head.

Young Ed Calloway was called, and won two rings. His horse was a piece of prancing satin, clean-limbed, true-bred, —"Got lots more sense'n Young Ed himself," growled Mart into Judy's ear.

"Knight of Plaindealing," Oscar Gooden's voice was a clarion of triumph to the two in the grandstand. They leaned, Judy clutching Mart's arm, forgetful of who might see, breathless, projecting their anxiety, their hope for him, to bring him whirling down the line of posts, to steady his lance for the rings. . . . He bent his young body, so that he and the horse were one . . . Florrie . . . more than ready for the word, ran straight and at the top of her pace. . . .

"By Judas, he got 'em all three," said Mart. "What did I tell you!"

He had told her nothing, but that made no difference. Voices near them, not unfriendly, said, "Who was that?" And other voices answered, "Joe Kemp's boy—don't you know?" and Mart glanced round at the speakers in a sort of vicarious paternal pride, flinging one leg over the other, leaning back with perilous negligence on the wavering boards. "Well begun is half done," he quoted sagely. "I'm as wrought up as if I was doing it myself, darned if'm not. Lee's one ring ahead on Young Ed on the first round, Judy. Notice that?"

They did not watch the next contestants, so much there was to talk about, to tell each other in what Lee had done. Judy's cheeks had mounted flaming color.

"Oh, he will win, Unc' Mart, he will, I know it," she

kept saying, over and over again. Virgie pinched her on the arm to make her keep quiet.

"People are looking at you," whispered Virgie primly.

"He's got a likely chance—a likely chance," was all Mart could babble in reply. But he could not sit still. "Reckon I'll go down amongst the riders before his turn comes again," he said to Judy. "I'll just say a steadying word or two to 'im. He'll be pret' near off his head, I shouldn't wonder."

The round began again—the riders past all smiling. They were in earnest now. The redoubtable Jeems Aaron let his lance waver for an unlucky second and missed two of the rings. The droll Knight of the Plow and Harrow scored one and missed two, and some of those who had made poor scores on the first round redeemed themselves now. Young Ed Calloway made a perfect score.

And then again came Lee. . . . He, too, wavered, missed one. His second score was two. Still, so far he was tied with the best, all save one slender dark youth from Queen Anne County, who won every ring on both rounds and led them all. He was cheered by a Queen Anne faction, but louder voices besought the native sons not to be beaten by an outsider.

"Come on, boys—show 'em what home folks can do," rose a shrill far-reaching cry from a little man in a plaid great-coat and dingy cap, out in front of the grandstand. And the crowd caught and echoed the cry. "Come on—home folks!" The colored man who had served fried oysters faithfully to the hungry crowd climbed on a chair and waved his white jacket. "Home boys—come a-runnin'," he begged, and the crowd laughed and cheered him.

On the grandstand every one was standing, shifting, swaying, and the aged timbers beneath them creaked warningly, but they held, so no one heeded.

"Come on! Come on! Come a-runnin'—Home Folks—"

The shouting and the press worried and fretted the

horses—they were skittish, hard to manage. They did not understand. They were not trained to this sort of thing, and they hated it. They reared and shied, and kicked. The Knight of Betterton was thrown and his plume broken and rolled in the dirt. He got up, limping and white, clutching a smashed collar bone. Some one caught his horse and helped him to friends. He was out of the third round.

"Hustle 'em up, Oscar," shouted Luther Gadd. "Run 'em off fast's you can, or else we'll have more accidents. The devil's in the horses."

Oscar hustled 'em. His big voice boomed and bellowed. He hardly gave his helpers enough time to put the new rings back in place—they had to run to get out of the way. But Oscar kept on hustling 'em.

Only the youths who had kept their heads and their horses calm scored on this round. Jeems Aaron was a prey to the prevalent madness, and took only one ring. Other boys who had scored well before missed every ring. The horse of the Knight of Queen Anne was determined to rear at every post, and had to be fought the whole way, so that his rider won only two rings. Still, his score was good. Young Ed's thoroughbred showed her mettle and ran true once more. Her master won three rings, tying with the Queen Anne boy.

Judy waited, hands clenched. She thought she would die of the suspense. She did not see how she could live until it was over. Virgie's polite little comments and the Reverend Todd's answers had no part in her consciousness. She stood up with the others and waved and shouted. Oh . . . would Lee never ride again? . . . Was he never coming?

She saw Mart climbing up through the crowd toward her. "What is it?" she cried out to him. "Why don't he come?" And then she knew by Mart's face that something had happened.

"He ain't going to ride the third time, Judy," he said. "That old plow horse got rampaging round and lashed out

and caught Florrie square on the hock and she's gone dead lame. I think she'd stand up to one more round, and I told him to go ahead, but he won't do it. It's all up." He made a gesture of finality.

It was unbelievable tragedy. "He's not going to ride again? He's lost?" asked Judy. "Oh, Unc' Mart. . . ." She could not believe it.

"Ain't it the damnedest luck! Didn't even get a chance. I give that young red-head a piece of my mind—crazy kids like him oughtn't to be allowed on a horse. But that wasn't no good. By Judas, I'd ruther've lost every horse I had in the stable than have this happen. I went over and asked Doc Tithelow if he couldn't borrow a horse for the last round, but it's against the rules. All three rounds on the one horse." He shook his head, sunk in despair.

"But where's Lee gone to, then?" asked Judy, anguished.

"He's back there in the stable shed, trying to fix up Florrie. She's right bad cut. I s'pose it wouldn't've been right to've ridden her again, but yet. . . . I told him to go ahead. He wouldn't hear to it. Just set his mouth, and didn't answer me."

The turbulent crowd was seething, shouting all about them, for Oscar was still hustling 'em. And now a mightier, more intense roar drew them from their depths. "What is it?" asked Mart, craning over the crowd.

The third round had been finished, and the four who had tied for high score were riding it off. Queen Anne's horse, still fractious, lost him the prize. Oscar's voice quieted the surrounding roar, dominated it.

"Knight of Tuckahoe—one on the Finals! Knight of Wye Mills—one on the Finals! Young Ed Calloway—two on the Finals—and WINNER!"

"Unc' Mart, take me home—take me home, will you? Before he finds me out and crowns me?" Judy clutched Mart Bladen's arm again, now in an agony of appeal. "I won't stand it—I won't. If he tries to hand me that old bunch of flowers I'll—I'll throw it right smack in his face.

Take me home. . . . Please, Unc' Mart. . . . Please. . . ."

Mart stared down at her, the old-time light of deviltry lighting in his eyes. "By God, Judy, I'll do it. Here—quick. . . ."

They were gone before Virgie and the Reverend Todd had missed them.

CHAPTER TEN

"I SENT a boy out to the track with word for Lee to ride my horse home," said Mart heavily. "Told him to leave Florrie at Jack Evitt's—he's good as any vet'rinary I ever saw. He'll take good care of her."

The two were riding home in a hired buggy, dreary with disappointment. Judy was trying not to cry, but tears she could not control welled up in her eyes and she had to keep winking them away. Now and then they brimmed over.

"D'you think Florrie's lamed bad?" she asked.

"I don't know, and blamed if I care. I'd've been willing to lame every horse in my stable to have the boy win. And he would've won, too, if he'd had a chance. He was just euchred out of it by hard luck. He can ride Ed Calloway to a standstill, any day, give him a sound horse."

At the name of Ed Calloway, Judy shivered. "I'll bet he was mad when he didn't find me. But I couldn't've stood that. I s'pose he'll tell Pa."

For the first time Mart roused himself to see the folly of this precipitate retreat, the possibilities of unhappiness to Judy. "Look here, Judy—I'm as thick as a mule. We oughtn't to've come away like this. What'll Virgie do? She'll be looking for you—she'll be anxious. It'll probably start a regular towse. You'll have to say you got sick or something."

Judy shook her head. She, too, was now looking ahead. "Pa won't believe me. He—well, I don't know what he will do, Unc' Mart. But I don't care. There's some things I can stand, and some I can't. For all Ma says I might as well fight it out with him as let him make me do the things I hate. Only . . . I don't know. . . ." She was groping. Revolt was hard for her, she knew her own de-

pendence, her own solitude. "I wish I had told Sis, though."

"Let's go back—maybe we'll meet 'em on the way."

"We might meet Ed Calloway on the way, too."

"I reckon I can deal with Ed. What say, Judy? Shan't we turn round and go back? If you come home with Virgie and her beau, the Deacon won't have any handle against you." Mart too was in the maze of uncertainty. To expose Judy to any more of John Henry's malicious hatred was a culminating stroke of the day's disasters. He felt the need of caution, subterfuge, but was helpless to devise them, so foreign were they to his use. The unfairness of it all, his own helplessness, made him falter. He looked at her almost timidly, and with the somber bitterness that her division from him always roused in him.

"I reckon we better go back, hey?"

He turned the buggy without more ado, and they drove rapidly back toward town. Soon they began to meet the home-comers from the tournament, and the road grew thick with dust-clouds. At last, as he had supposed, they met Virgie and the minister, distracted, deep in anxiety.

Virgie exclaimed and flung out her hands to them. "Oh, Judy—what became of you—where've you been? . . . I been almost crazy. . . ."

Mart helped Judy out of the buggy and in with the other two.

"She was feeling right poorly," he lied carelessly, "and I started taking her home, and then it just struck me about you, Virgie, and how you'd take on—don't know why I didn't think of it at first—but I'm a plumb dolt sometimes—so we come on back to find you. You better take her home and get her to bed—she's right wrought up and upset."

"You poor child!" Virgie put a sympathetic arm around her. "She looks all to pieces—and I'm most so myself—what with Ed Calloway looking for her, and carrying on like mad,—mercy, what a time,—and all the folks talking,

and me not knowing. . . . I declare I didn't know if I was on my head or my heels. . . ."

"It was fortunate we met you, Mr. Bladen," added the Reverend Todd, precisely. "Every one was highly concerned."

"I reckon so. . . . I reckon so . . . yes . . . highly concerned. . . . I was myself. These chills—or maybe it's a touch of malaria—they come on so sudden and violent. Never mind, Judy. . . . You're all right now."

She had dropped against her sister's shoulder, but now, as he leaned for her over the wheel to take her hand, she opened her eyes, as blue as his own, and looked all her helplessness, all her forlornness, all her fear, silently through to him. Her gaze did not accuse, it did not appeal. It only told him that she was a child, and miserable, and alone, and that with his relinquishment of her, she had no protection, no help. "What am I going to do?" her eyes asked him. And he had no answer.

He stood by the roadside and watched the buggy drive out of sight before he continued his way back to town. He was engulfed in unhappiness. "If I only dared take her and do for her," he thought. "If I only dared say. . . . But it would be the worst thing that could happen to her. And to Louellen. And I got to send her back to John Henry. . . . Under his roof. . . ."

He had forgotten Lee as completely as he had been concerned with him before. Not until he got back to town did he remember. He took back the team he had hired to the livery, and went mechanically around to the Evitts' stable. The streets were still filled with people, and there was a buzz and rustle of comment which he could not escape. He heard the story half a dozen times within two squares—how Young Ed, the winner of the tournament, had been awarded the prize, but when he sought the girl he meant to honor, she was gone, vanished, utterly disappeared. How Young Ed had become first bewildered, then angry, made a show of himself.

". . . Slammed the crown and the flowers on the ground and put his foot on 'em and swore like a trooper. Said if he couldn't crown the girl he wanted there shouldn't be no Queen . . ." guffawed one diverted gossip.

"Judge Markwood gave it to him good and hot, though," chimed in another. "Shut him up, and made everybody sit down, and awarded the first prize to Tom Stevens, Knight of Wye Mills—told Young Ed his actions was a disgrace to the county, he did, cursing before ladies, and carrying on so. Never heard the old Judge come out so strong. So George he crowned Nettie Percy from over Wye way the Queen. . . ."

"What become of Young Ed?" asked Mart, interested in spite of his preoccupation.

"He flung off in a pet. Everybody laughing at him—say—it'll be many a long day before he'll live that story down. And the joke of it was the girl who give him the slip's just a little young thing, John Henry Hyde's youngest—you must know her, Mart—John Henry's your neighbor—pretty little thing she is, too, nothing but a child. She's a spunky young one, to trick Young Ed like that. And her Pa's on Young Ed's side, they tell me, too."

"I tell you one thing," offered another pleased commentator, "this'll cost Judge Markwood old Billy Calloway's support in the campaign this fall, sure's the world."

"It won't do him any real hurt," said another. "Old Billy Calloway can't help the Judge much, one way or t'other. The Judge is too solid for him."

Mart went on, turned down an alley, found the Evitts' stable, all this gossip whirling in his head like bees swarming. Lee was coming from the door, a new Lee, older, graver, aged out of boyhood, transmuted definitely into a man grown.

"You got the word I sent?" asked Mart.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Evitts says Florrie'll be all right. He don't think she ought to be left to stiffen up, though. He said I'd better ride her out to your place to-night. I

thought I'd borrow a horse to ride and lead her. I hate to, though, it hurts her so to walk." He spoke as a mature man, not asking for Mart's decision. "Mr. Evitts said he'd lend me his mare. I was just putting the saddle on her."

"All right," said Mart. "I'll go and get Chloe, and meet you out in front of the Court-house."

It was dusk when they started from town, slowly, accommodating their pace to that of the limping, drooping Florrie. Mart sent sidelong glances at the boy beside him.

"No use feeling down in the mouth," he said, affecting a cheerfulness of his own. "You'd've won, sure's shooting, if you hadn't had hard luck. It was all that pesky red-headed kid's fault."

Lee did not answer. Mart tried again.

"Anyway, 'twan't no satisfaction to Young Ed, winning, if all I hear's true." He told the story of Judy's evasion of him, and the tale he had heard of Young Ed's anger and Judge Markwood's rebuke. "So you see, might've been a sight worse," he concluded.

At last Lee burst from the fastness of his own concentrated thought. "It's not any use, Mr. Bladen. 'Twasn't just luck. I was careless—I ought to've watched out better and kept away from that old horse when it got to cutting up. It was my fault. And it just shows me one thing—'tain't no use for me to stick around here any longer. I meant to set myself up as somebody if I'd've won. I thought people would see then that I was some account and could do as well as the next one. But now, I'm right where I was before, and that's nowhere. I figure I'd better get away—clean away, go clear out of the state, out West, maybe, and make my way where nobody knows me. I'm not so dumb but I could, I reckon."

"But look here, boy," expostulated Mart, surprised, chagrined. "I don't want you to leave me. You and me get along fine. I like to have you round the house—"

"So long's I'm here I'm just somebody folks thinks you're kind to," said Lee, with bitterness. "I'm not nobody of

myself. I want to be somebody where people don't know about my—about my kin, and mark me with it. You been mighty kind to me, Mr. Bladen, and maybe I'm not grateful, the Lord knows, but what chance've I got around here, honest? You know, just as well as I do. I'd set my heart on to-day, and it turned into nothing. No, sir, I'm a-going to get out, to get clear away."

Mart felt depths he must not penetrate, reserves he must not probe. "Well, if you're set on it—a man can't be much different or do much different than he feels, I say. So maybe it'd be for the best."

Lee's disappointment, his defeat, the annihilation of his hopes and plans, drove him into open confidence. "And look here, Mr. Bladen. There's Judy. Judy Hyde. I reckon you can see how I feel towards her. But what chance I got? John Henry Hyde'd run me off the place with a shot gun if I went up there open, and I've had to sneak around like I was a skunk stealing chickens when I go to see her. But if I go off and earn some money and get somewhere, I can come back and court her as open and above board as anybody, with my head up and money in my pockets. John Henry couldn't say nothing against me, because, because—" He hesitated. He did not know how to say it. "I'd *be* somebody. See?"

Mart saw, but he also saw a valid objection. "Yeah, son —but whilst you're away she might very easy get married to somebody else. D'you think of that?"

"No—not Judy. She'd wait for me, and I know it. She's not the fickle kind."

"All women are the fickle kind."

"Judy's not. Anyway I can't marry her now. I'm too young and so's she, and now, whilst she's too young to marry anybody else is the time I ought to be putting in my best licks at getting on in the world. I'll never get anywhere around here—never."

The despair in his voice, his determination showed how he had hypnotized himself into an utter belief in what he

said. Mart recognized it, and acquiesced in it. "If you feel so strong thisaway, maybe you've got the rights of it. When d'you want to light out?"

"In the morning. You don't need me any longer—the heavy work's done, and there's nothing but the fall plowing and the corn husking." Mart could feel the undertone of wild impatience to be gone, he saw that the boy was putting a strong curb on himself, that the day's emotions had been a stormy ordeal.

"Don't you want to wait a day or two and kind of mull it over?"

"No—no, Mr. Bladen. There's no use waiting."

"Maybe not. But—seems to me kind of a far venture. S'pose it don't turn out exactly like you're figuring on."

There was an instant of feeling silence, and then the boy's cry came from his heart. "I ain't going to think about that. I got to try it, anyhow. If I didn't I might just as well give up, and—and be like the rest of the Kemps."

"Well, sir—I guess you're right, and don't you mind what kind of spoil-sport things I been saying. That's nothing but age talkin' to youth, like it always talks. Got any place in mind to strike out for?"

"I thought I'd go to Chicago and hunt me a job at the stock yards. There was a piece in the paper said they paid big wages out there. And if I don't like the city I'm going out to some of them ranches you hear about, and maybe buy me a little bunch of cattle, and see what I can do."

It was the vaguest, most nebulous of plans, but it was a plan, and it impressed Mart accordingly. "Well, sir—that sounds right reasonable. Want I should lend you a little cash? I'd be glad to. Might call it an investment."

"I can get along. I been saving my wages." He was not ungracious, but he was already remote, absorbed in that future that was to blot out the past, assuage the wounds of poverty and defeat.

"Wisht I'd've done something like that when I was a

young man," said Mart meditatively. "But no, I never thought of it. I was like a field-mouse, I had me a snug bed and I stayed in it."

He began to think of how it would seem to have Lee gone. "I'm goin' to miss you right smart, Cæsar and me both. And Sally, too."

"I'll miss you-all. I'll miss you more'n I'll miss my own blood-kin."

"I never took much stock in all the talk about blood-kin, and how you ought to like 'em, and do for 'em just because they come from the same root and branch as yourself," spoke Mart. "My sisters are the two most wearisome women in the whole of the state of Maryland, and their children's ugly-mannered and greedy, and why shouldn't I see it even if I am their uncle? They was right nice young girls, my sisters, too, but now they're fat and bossy. No, I don't hold with blood-kin ties. Always seemed to me mostly a kind of conceit, when a man or a woman cracks up his family and all his relations just because they got the same name."

He was aware that Lee was not listening, but it eased him to speak these casual nothings. Events were crowding on him too fast. He did not have time to get done with one situation before he was in the thick and press of another. First Judy, then Lee, and now Judy and Lee inextricably intertwined. It had been a confusing, hateful, miserable day. For consolation he dwelt on the story that Judge Markwood had publicly "dressed down" the objectionable Young Ed. Mart wished he had been where he could have listened. He had heard the Judge in invective before this, and he was amazing. Lost in such reflections they turned in at the home lane, Florrie still limping painfully, Lee wrapt in a vision of winning fame and wealth in the unknown West, Mart a little bemused under the stresses of the day.

Manlike, they discussed no details of Lee's going. But in the evening, after supper, Judy was mentioned again.

"You ought to say good-by to her," said Mart.

Lee looked at him somberly. "If I went over there her Pa'd not let me see her. Oh, I know it. But she'll understand. I told her once I was going off if things didn't come out right." He paused, knitting his brows. "And look here, Mr. Bladen, I can't lose a day. I been going over it in my mind. Young Ed'll be sore and mad at her now for tricking him, and running off, and he'll stay away from her, so I don't need to worry about him. And she promised me straight out she wouldn't marry him—"

"She did!"

"Yes, sir, she did. I asked her, because I couldn't take no chance on that. But look—how pretty she is! Even with Young Ed out the way there's bound to be a pack of other fellows after her, once she grows up a little more. She's the prettiest girl anywheres round—you know she is. So I got to hustle. Saying good-by ain't anything. She knows how I feel." He looked up at Mart with perfect trust. "And then you're right here alongside of her—you c'n take care of her."

Vehement words rushed to Mart Bladen's lips. *"I* take care of her," he wanted to cry out. "Of all the people in the world, I've taken less care of her than any. I've been worse to her than John Henry himself—"

But he was silent. He drew a long troubled sigh. These things must never be said—confession, however relieving, must never be made. "I'll do my possible," he promised, "but you know I got no right to interfere in any man's family affairs, like I told you before."

As Lee was going upstairs to bed he gave a short boyish chuckle. "There's one bright spot in this thing, Mr. Bladen—when I think how swelled up with mad Young Ed Calloway is—I could laugh, blest if I couldn't. That's something, ain't it?"

Mart agreed that it was.

In the morning Mart drove him to the train, and shook his hand wrenchingly. "Good-by and good luck. You're

welcome to come back any time you're a mind to. And drop me a postal card every now and then, so's I know where you are and how you're getting on."

Lee answered haltingly. "Yes, sir—yes, sir, I'll do it. And say—look here, Mr. Bladen—you'll tell Judy about me going off—and—and let me know how she is and what's going on—her Pa, you know—he's been so down on her—"

"I'll do my possible for Judy and you, too," promised Mart again.

But when the train had gone and he turned to go home, he had again that flash of feeling that life had wholly deluded and hoaxed him, denied him. He had done nothing. He had achieved nothing for himself or for others. And that the simple content in which most of his days was passed was something stupid, thin and poor. He did not rebel against his life, as did John Henry. But his face was clouded, and his heart beat wearily. Once again he felt the creeping premonition of empty age.

"I'll get me a drink of whisky soon's I get home," he thought. "I need a little stim'lant, dull's I feel. I'm going to miss that boy, doggone him—I don't know why he had to get this idea in his head—and yet I do see—and young folks are rash, they can't wait for things to turn round to 'em, but they've got to up and fix matters themselves. And I promised him I'd see to Judy, but how I'm to do it beats me, without coming right down to trouble with John Henry."

He drove in past the house, calling Ephum to come and unharness, got out of the buggy and left it before the stable. As he did so he saw with impatience that the upper barn door was open, swinging in the wind.

"Damn those niggers," he cursed. "They've broke that ketch again, or else they've just left her open for carelessness."

Into the barn he went, climbed the stairs to the loft, and straddled through the loose slippery hay that blocked his way. He reached for the door, but as he did so, it swung

back, away from him. Cursing and growling his impatience, he reached again, leaning far out, caught at it as it came a little nearer to him, missed, over-balanced and fell. His great body flung out of the high door, desperately agitated, like some great manikin, galvanized and sprawling and clumsy, as he clutched and kicked to try to save himself. There were stones below.

But it was no use. He went down, turning a grotesque and tragic somersault, struck and lay still. Ephum, coming lazily to unharness, found him there and raised a mighty cry of terror and dread.

"Sally!" he shouted. "Sally! Marse Mart done fall en kill hissef! Oh, Lawd in heben—oh, mah Lawd. . . ."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was no use trying to keep the story of the tournament from John Henry. He got it all, roused to instant suspicion when Virgie and Judy both came home with the Reverend Todd, and without Young Ed. Before the minister's callow dignity John Henry managed to be calm. He made no comment, save moderate exclamations at the unusual quality of the tale, but he darted toward the drooping, unhappy Judy a glance of such black censure that she winced and shuddered. The Reverend Todd was looking at Virgie and did not see that. But Louellen saw it, and so did Rachel, who was standing, out of vision, at a crack of the kitchen door. Rachel had smelled trouble, and she meant to hear it first-hand.

"You better go to bed, Judy," said Louellen. "You do look poorly, and that's a fact."

It was a slight defense and futile, this getting her out of sight and hearing of John Henry. No sooner had the Reverend Todd departed than John Henry summoned the erring one before him.

"You go on out, Louellen," he said; "I'm going to talk to the young lady alone."

"No, I reckon I'll stay," said Louellen, sitting down.

"You go out, I tell you. It'll be better for all concerned."

"No."

"You go."

"I'm going to stay right here and listen to every word you say to Judy."

"I suppose you're afraid somebody'll harm your pet. I suppose you're afraid she might be punished for making herself and her family a by-word and a laughing-stock through the whole county and putting an open slight on a fine young chap like Ed Calloway. I suppose you want to

uphold her in such doings, as you've always upheld her in all her frowardness and contumacy."

Louellen tried to be reasonable. "I don't uphold Judy when she's done something wrong, and you know it. But I'm not going to have her scared half out of her life and nagged and hollered at by you over nothing. She don't like Ed Calloway and you forcing him on her the way you do sets her against him worse'n ever and drives her into doing these ridiculous things, because she's nothing but a child, and when a child's in panic, it'll cut and run, every time. And that's all that Judy did to-day. She might've done a lot worse."

She was aware that she was not changing his mood, or softening it, but rather deepening and intensifying it. But she must make her protest, cost what it would. She felt in him something more harsh, more inexorable, than she had ever known before.

He did not answer her except to show that strange cruel smile of his she knew so well, and to open the stair door. "Judy—come down here," he called.

After a moment Judy came. She had taken off her new frock, and put on an old wrapper, faded blue, the collar unbuttoned, showing the babyish softness of her throat. She had braided her hair. The childishness, the defenselessness of her, the fear in her eyes, hurt Louellen so that she could hardly bear it. But she did not go to her as she wished to do. An open embrace might only incite John Henry to deeds of perverse madness.

"Well, Miss," said John Henry, still with his stiff smile, "perhaps you'll explain now why you acted the way you did this afternoon."

"I can't explain." She didn't lift her eyes.

"You'd better try."

"There wouldn't be any use. You wouldn't believe me."

"Is that the way to answer me?"

Judy was silent for a moment. "I don't know any other way to answer you," she said at last desperately. "I was

up there on the grandstand and when Ed Calloway won I knew he'd come and crown me Queen before everybody and I couldn't stand it. So I run off."

"You run off alone, I suppose. Where did you run to?"

Judy dropped her head, her voice was very low. "I run off with Unc' Mart. He was right there and I asked him to take me away and get me out of sight so's Ed Calloway couldn't find me. And he did. And when we'd come a piece he said he was afraid Virgie'd worry too much and we turned around and come back and met Virgie on the road. And I came on home with her. There, that's all of it."

"You knew I'd forbidden you to have anything to do with Mart Bladen, a drunken sot, a notorious evil-liver."

"You only said I shouldn't go over there to his house nor run out to the road when he come by. That's not the same. I couldn't help his being on the grandstand."

John Henry was working himself up into a passion of denunciation, walking back and forth, his dark vein twitching, his hands uneasy. He came up to Judy and stared at her. Foul words bubbled to his lips. "You vicious little b-bitch," he broke out, his voice snarling, thick with rage. "You stinking little trull. By rights I ought to take a gad to you and—" His arms shot out, he caught and shook her with all his strength, as if he would tear her in pieces. Judy did not cry out—she was a rag in his hands—but Louellen leaped at him, caught his arms, wrenching, fighting.

"Stop it," she cried out wildly. "*John Henry!* I'll call in the farm hands and have you tied up—"

She did not know what she was saying, nor did he. He flung Judy aside violently. "Go upstairs to your room," he commanded, "and don't let me see you again till I've decided what punishment's fit for you—"

He strode into his own little den, and banged the door hard behind him, turned the key. Judy looked at Louellen and Louellen at Judy. "Go back to bed," whispered Lou-

ellen. "I'll come up presently, and we'll talk. Did he—hurt you much?"

"No," said Judy, dazed. "He didn't hurt me much—maybe my arms—" She touched the places where he had grasped her. "Mother—Mother—I don't know what to do—" She was trembling, stricken with utter terror. "He looked so . . . do you think he means to whip me? . . ."

"You go on upstairs," repeated Louellen. "No, he shan't touch you again, not ever."

She was far from feeling the confidence she expressed, but she must drive that fear from Judy's eyes, must reassure her. "Run on, dear," she urged, "before he comes out again." At the thought of John Henry's reappearance Judy scuttled away.

Louellen stood, looking at his closed door, bending toward it a little in the concentration of her indecision. What to do? Her thoughts went madly round and round, flying always in pain, in apprehension. At last she went slowly to the door and put her face close to the crack of it.

"John Henry," she said. He did not reply. The consoling wish came to her that he might be dead, stricken with the sudden apoplexy of anger, and for a moment she hesitated, relishing the thought. She spoke again, her words like pebbles chipped against glass: "John Henry. You listen to me. If you ever lay your hand on Judy again, I'll go to the next prayermeeting, and when they're giving in experiences I'll get right up before the church full and tell everything—*everything—about you—and about me*. Understand me? I mean it. I'll do it if I have to crawl there. I'll make the county ring." She waited for an answer, but none came. Again she thought of the possibility that he might have had a stroke, but she did not care. "He's locked the door, so if anything's happened to him I can't get at him."

Long ago, when they were first married, she remembered how she had wished for death for herself. Now she stood there coolly wishing death for John Henry without a quiver

at the wickedness of it. But she was trembling, trembling more than Judy.

Weakly she went over to her chair and dropped down, overpowered. Her mind was intent on what she had said to John Henry, through the door. It was the first time she had ever put that threat into words, though she had often dreamed of it.

"I'll do it," she vowed. "I'll do it as sure as I live if he touches Judy again. He's been warned. I don't care if it pulls the whole world down on my head, I'll do it. To speak to her that way. . . . He ought to be tied up like a mad dog. It'd be gall and wormwood to his pride and vanity to have people know. . . . His place in the church and folks praising him up—that's his meat and drink. If it was only me he took his spite out on, and not Judy!" Again she faced the grimness of the innocent bearing the punishment of the guilty, pressed the sharp thorn of that knowledge into her heart. And in her heart there pressed also a sharp doubt, a doubt that made her scorn herself, but which persisted in spite of that self-scorn, a doubt that asked her if she had courage, strength, daring enough to brand John Henry Hyde and herself, publicly, as she had warned him she would do if he ever touched Judy again in violence. Her doubt reminded her dispassionately that always at the crux of action she had failed—she had failed to break off her marriage with John Henry, she had failed to stay with Mart though she had fled to him! Always, always she had failed. It was not unlikely that she would fail once more. Terribly she feared her weakness, recognizing it, hating it.

Virgie and Bud ventured in, looking about them awfully.

"What'd he do to her, Ma? What'd he say?" asked Virgie. "I'd never have told him in the world if there'd been any way to have kept it. But there he was, at me—and of course Will Todd didn't know, and he out with everything. Was Pa awful mean with her?"

"Yes, he was," said Louellen, "and he's in there now

thinking up a way to punish her. I don't know what's to come of it all."

"If I'd only known what she was up to, I'd've begged her to stay and let Ed Calloway crown her and not make a fuss. But she was gone in a wink. I was so upset. Only some people said she'd gone along with Unc' Mart, and so —well, it was awful mortifying, with Ed at such a pitch. Only I don't like him, and so I wasn't sorry for him."

Louellen looked at her two older children doubtfully. She was not sure how much she ought to tell them, or how little. "I'm going upstairs to Judy," she said. "Tell Rachel to put supper on, and you go ahead and eat. We're an hour late with it now."

The house imperceptibly shook down into its calm monotony of routine. Rachel appeared, stormy at the violence done her favorite, her under lip projecting in magnificent barbaric anger, banging plates, rattling knives and forks with vindictive emphasis.

"How anybody especk suppeh gwine tas'e lak suppeh, dis hou' de night! All dry up erwaitin', settin' on top de stove. Er lot ah keer! Ah doan keer ef it choke some people to def, so ha'd en dry." She directed a poisonous glance toward the closed door behind which John Henry was concealed.

Virgie and Bud gave a helpless look. "Come on, let's eat," he said, his boy's appetite asserting itself. "I'm hollow to my toes."

Silently they slipped into their places, began to eat quickly, so as not to disturb the man in the little room beyond.

"Going to call him?" whispered Bud.

Virgie shook her head.

"It may make him madder yet if he knows we went on and had supper without him."

Rachel had paused to hear them. The old woman gave them a scornful glance, walked heavily over to the door and banged on it with her fist. "Suppeh raidy," she called

in full voice, mockingly, defiantly, through to the angry demon hidden there. Then she stalked off to the kitchen, swinging her shoulders, head up.

Virgie and Bud waited, but there was no sound. They went on eating, exchanging meaningful looks, now and then.

"Home sweet home," whispered Bud. "No place like home, thank goodness."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Doctor Tithelow wiped his fat efficient old hands on the towel Ephum had brought. "You want the truth?" he asked judicially.

"If you can tell it," replied Mart with rough humor. These weeks of complete helplessness had changed him little. Even his eyes did not show his suffering. His ruddy color had faded but not noticeably. Perhaps the finger touch of silver at his temples had widened. But that was all. He lay there in his bare disordered bedroom, propped with pillows, inert, unbroken in temper or in mirth.

Still the doctor hesitated. "Go ahead, spit it out," urged Mart. "Nobody ever said of me yet I was a coward."

"Here it is then. You've got a year at the most. Maybe less. But not more. I wish to God I could tell you something different."

"A year's plenty if I've got to lie here with a broken back," said Mart. "Yes, sir, a year's plenty. But at that I might fool you."

"I hope you do."

"Let's lay a bet on it. I'll put up Chloe against that prize pair of beagles of yours that I'm right here two years come Christmas. I'll put it in my will that you're to get her in case I lose. What say, Doc?"

"I always have hankered after that mare," said the Doctor, rising to his spirit. "I'll go you, damn if I don't."

"That's O. K. then—and you better make up your mind to kiss your beagles good-by. By Judas, I don't feel a bit like dying."

"I wish you had a nurse here, some good sensible woman who'd make you comfortable."

"Now for God's sake don't begin again to talk about a nurse for me. I had to drive Sis Mollie and Sis Rhoda

out the house as it is. They set me crazy. No, sir, Ephum and Sally and I've stuck together a right good while and I guess we can make out to the end."

"Why don't you send for that boy of Joe Kemp's to come back—he'd be a lot of help to you? I kind of liked that boy."

"No—I won't do that. He was so set on going and to hi'st him back here to hang around an old cripple ain't fair to him. Post card come from him only yesterday, and he's got a good job out in Chicago, and he's tickled to death with himself. No, sir, I put no claim on anybody, and never did. And if my time's so short all the more reason why I should get along as I am."

"All the more reason why you should be comfortable, and have good care, you pig-head."

"Well, I won't have anybody, so there's the long and short of it. Now see here, Doc, Ephum sleeps right outside my door—he's put up a pallet for himself, and I can't stir but what he's awake and ready to do for me. And when I'm awake if he's back in the kitchen or out anywheres, I got this bell here and I sound it. I don't know of anything that could suit me better. Of course, if I get much worse, or more helpless—say, Doc, am I going to get much worse, suffer much?"

"You'll maybe get more helpless, but you won't suffer much. And I want you to stay absolutely quiet. If you try to roust around you'll maybe go out—like that." He lightly snapped a thumb and finger. "Take it easy—and don't worry any more'n you can help."

Mart laughed. "Fine advice to give a man who's always been up and around, and mostly lived on horseback. Judas Priest, that's what irks me the most, that I'll never throw a leg over a horse again. I have one of the hands exercise Chloe every day right down the lane here where I can watch him, and sometimes it makes me want to cry when I see her, with Cæsar racing alongside, looking up as if he was wondering why I wasn't on her."

Cæsar, lying by the bedside, heard his name and thumped an acknowledging tail.

"The time gets heavy, I know," said the Doctor, his voice a little hoarse.

"You betcha it does. Doc, what say we have a little game of seven-up? You got the time?"

"If I hadn't, I'd take it."

"I'm just aching to feel the cards under my fingers. They're there on the stand. What stakes shall we play?" He was all eagerness, his infirmity forgotten.

The Doctor lifted a makeshift table, legs sawed off, to stand across Mart's body, and brought the cards. They settled to the game.

When it was over Mart had won a dime, and was correspondingly cheered. The Doctor was actually peevish, and this dislike of losing which was always manifest in him at cards raised Mart's spirits further as a friend's small weaknesses always amuse and elate. But as his guest put on his coat to go the sick man's face fell.

"Drop in every time you're passing, won't you, Doc?" he begged. "And tell any of the boys you see to ride out and have a game. I may be bed-rid, but I'm still able to play cards."

"Yes, I'll tell 'em. And I'll be back myself to get my revenge or else to lose some more of my hard-earned money." He turned at the door. "By the way, I pretty near forgot one piece of news I only heard this morning. Maybe you know it already. About your neighbor over here—John Henry?"

"No—I haven't heard tell of any of John Henry's doings since I fell out the barn-loft—maybe longer. We never did have much put, John Henry and me, and lately we had less'n ever. What's he up to now?"

"You know his oldest girl—Virgie—the one that's to be married to the young Methodist minister along in the New Year?"

"Yeah—I know 'em all."

"Well, now I hear they're going to make it a double wedding and marry off the little one—Judy—to Young Ed Calloway at the same time. You remember the to-do there was at the tournament, about her dishing him, and all. I guess there wasn't much to it. But I want to tell you, Mart, that it's a living crime to put a girl that's hardly more'n a child, as pretty and as sweet as a posy, into Young Ed Calloway's claws. There's a taint in his blood, and hell's bells, look at the life he's led! Of course he's all for piety and hymn-singing now—but it wasn't so long ago when he come down to my office pretty near out of his mind. He thought he'd got a touch of something no man wants, off that shantyboat girl he was thick with for so long. And anyway, even if he was clean as a whistle, the whole Calloway connection's bad. Not that I ever thought much of John Henry Hyde—but that youngest of his never seemed like him—she was more like the Wests, and they were good people, all the way through."

"I don't believe it, Doc—I don't believe Judy'd let herself be pushed into marrying Young Ed—I don't believe her mother'd stand it. I can think anything of John Henry—and I kind of like to think as bad as I can of him—he's the sort that makes you feel thataway."

"I don't know—but it's the talk that's a-going round."

Mart watched the door close behind him, not sorry that he had gone. So, it had come. The little scraps and hints that had been before—he recalled Rena—had become something definite. While he had been lying there helpless and suffering, John Henry had somehow compassed his desire, to do the worst that he could with Judy. He had bullied and brow-beaten the child, somehow,—God knew by what evil ways,—into a forced consent. She had broken her promise to Lee—and he was breaking his, as well, and he *had* meant to look out for her. Sweat, sweat of suffering more acute than had yet gripped him, stood out on his forehead. He fetched a heaving sigh.

Twice before he had had premonitions, warnings of age,

futility, but he had never thought it would be like this from such a silly senseless accident. That when the great need came for him to act he should be physically helpless! In all his life he had never been anything but active, strong, full of power and vigor. Now his helpless legs, his weighted hips, mocked at the memory of that strength.

A darker, more tormenting thought shot through his rage at his helplessness. Doc Tithelow had said that death was near—it might come in a year—it might come sooner. Mart knew that he had been told the truth, he was conscious in himself of the waning of his life-force. Something within warned him that the steel of his strength, the fiber of his vitality were alike eaten through, and might at any time break.

And after that—nothingness.

He closed his eyes and began to talk aloud to himself, a habit new to him, come since his accident, his enforced helplessness.

"I wonder if there is a God. I wonder if there could be. I don't recollect that I ever speculated whether there was one or not. But anyway, if there is, you listen here, God, I've got something to say to you. Things are getting pretty thick for me. I've lived my life free and easy, I know. I've always liked a good horse and a pretty woman—not that I was ever loose with women, for I never had no taste for that—and a game of cards and a bottle of good whisky, and I'd rather go fox-hunting than to prayermeeting, any day. So far as I'm concerned I'll stand on my record, and take my chance of hell-fire, whenever you say so,—if you've got any say to it. But I'm not going to leave little Judy here with that old chinwhiskered hypocrite John Henry Hyde egging her on to marry a buzzard like Young Ed Calloway. Ed Calloway! By cripes, I don't know what the young men are coming to to-day. I was wild enough—but I wasn't *rotten*. Let him get his filthy paws on my Judy?—Not much! I've left most everything slip by me in the past, and done nothing, and I've held my peace and

stood back when I ought to've done something to John Henry, no matter what confusion come of it. But—if this is true—I'm going to put my invention on it, and till I see some way out, I give you fair notice, God, that I'm not a-going to die, not for all Doc Tithelow says—not if you was to send old Gabriel himself after me and he bust a lung blowing on his trumpet—and that's flat."

He opened his eyes again, and felt better. He could even smile a little, thinking what a fool he was to have made believe there was a God and talked to him as man to man. All the same he had stated his case, he had made it clear to himself as well as to this mythical Deity whose existence he had never actively questioned, but had also never actively accepted, just what he had to do before the coming of that final unescapable nothingness that was on its way. Despite his utter helplessness he had never before felt such power. He had found at last the alkahest, whereby his sluggish acquiescences, his viscous aimlessness might be transmuted into swift piercing purpose, a swift weapon for the breast of his enemies.

But over and beyond this he was aware of a terrible loneliness, a new emotion for him, who had always been peacefully self-sufficient. It had come with his purpose, it was part of a different soul which had invaded him, possessed him. Strength was vouchsafed him, but this, this isolation, this desire for some one of his own, some one bound to him by ties of love, and not obligation, or self interest, some one to be near him, to understand as he went down into that nothingness which he could see so clearly,—if he could have this, before, the afterwards did not matter.

He stared around his neglected bedroom, and discovered that just now, when he must so soon leave it forever, he was really seeing it for the first time, its bare walls and ugly 1870 furniture painted yellow and gray, its torn rag carpet, and the careless paraphernalia of riding sticks, dog muzzles, medicine bottles, soiled linen, smoky

lamps and tossed-down papers, accumulations of years. He felt a quick distaste for it all—it had been all right to live in, but it was mighty slovenly to die in. Yet he loved it. It was home.

He could not quite believe it yet, for all his ready acceptance before the Doctor, that he was so soon to leave all this, and his loamy acres that he had tilled for so many years of good harvests, as his fathers had done before him. He had said to himself, sometimes, since the accident, that if he had to lie helpless in bed he'd just as well be in his coffin, —yet he had not expected a sentence of death, this definite limiting of his time. Again he brought himself back from his wandering speculations with a jerk. After all—it mattered very little about him—his day was done. But Judy, there—she had her years of experience to come. She must be safeguarded by his failing hands. That was the thing he must think about—that and none other.

He had expected her to come to see him every day since his fall, every day that he was conscious—for at first he had lain in a stupor, an enveloping fog, part shock, part opiates, from which he had emerged but slowly. She had not come, and he was sure that she had been prevented by John Henry. He threshed his arms about impatiently, impotently. He swore. He gnawed his fingers. What a trap he was in, what a devil's own trap!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JOHN HENRY HYDE, behind the locked door where he had carried his overflowing bile, his loosened self, had listened with unhearing ears alike to Louellen's warning and Mammy Rachel's scornful summons to supper. His own caution, his own guile rebuked him, cautioned him that he had made a fool of himself, that he had gone all the wrong way to get what he wished. Not that he regretted shaking Judy. It had been a rich, luscious satisfaction to set his fingers in her soft flesh and feel her helplessness in his hands. He had enjoyed it. But after all, this was not what he wanted. His sick imagination told him that there were other things that might be done to her that would be far worse for her, a far more lasting and destructive vengeance.

In young Ed Calloway he had seen the perfect instrument, ready to his hand. By giving Judy to young Ed he would ostensibly be a good father, marrying a daughter worthily, both as to worldly goods and as to religion. And in the younger man he knew there was a beastliness akin to that which lived in his own breast, that had found no expression save in those first years when he had had Louellen all innocent and soft, to break, to tear, to smear and dominate. But Louellen had cheated him, had, in the end, been too strong for him, had flung him back, denied his beast, and escaped him. All the same, there had been a time. . . .

Even so would young Ed deal with Judy, and by getting her young, he would have more chance to break her absolutely, to accomplish a complete compulsion, a lasting, humiliating control. John Henry gloated over the hope of Judy violated, anguished, wasted. If he could have given her to young Ed Calloway without marriage, it would

have been a perfect thing to him. But marriage was necessary for his own good name. He had no mind to lose that in ruining Judy. Oh, but he wanted her spoiled, her bright color dimmed and paled, her laughter silenced, her youth extinguished. His distorted passion pressed him to this purpose. It was all clear to him now. He knew that this was what he needed, desired.

But he knew also that he had gone too far. No need for him to hurt and affright Judy now—young Ed would do that for him later. The thing was to get her in young Ed's power, and this unforeseen fiasco of the tournament and her running away, young Ed's humiliation before all the crowd would break off his suit. So, the necessity was to mend these broken ties, to weld them firmly. His devious brain turned hungrily to ways and means by which this must be done.

He drew out of his meditation as Louellen came downstairs to her own belated supper. To her surprise he was calm, even self-reproachful.

"I'll allow I was a little too harsh with Judy," he told his wife, "but I was so provoked with her foolishness. I'm not going to punish her, though, only that I won't allow her to go off the place except when she's with you and me. She's got to stay at home till she knows how to behave herself in public. You tell her that, Louellen. And tell her she's got to apologize to Ed, provided he's in any humor to listen to an apology."

Louellen, listening to such reasonable proposals, was as relieved as amazed. This was concession far beyond anything she had anticipated, and her whole consciousness, which, in spite of her misgivings as to her own strength, she had steeled to further conflict, relaxed, advanced to meet toleration with coöperation.

"I think she ought to apologize, too," she granted, "and I believe she'll see it in the same way when she's soothed down. She's only a child yet, John Henry,—you keep forgetting that. She's never been around much, out amongst

people, like Virgie has, and she gets excited and flies off the handle and does childish things."

"Hmm, yes," conceded John Henry, his eyes on his plate. "I expect you're right. I'll just ride over to see Bro' Calloway to-morrow and tell him I'm ashamed and sorry this has happened, and sound out how he feels. And in a day or two, provided he holds no grudge, I'll bring him out to supper, and everything'll be smoothed over."

Louellen started to say that if young Ed bore a grudge better let him bear it and keep him away, but she withheld the words. After all, Judy had behaved very badly, and an apology would not be out of place. If John Henry's violence could be quieted so easily, it seemed but a small price to pay.

Early the next day he drove over to young Ed's farm, and found him surly and unwelcoming. John Henry put on an air of awkwardness, and softness, ingratiating, halting.

"I don't suppose you're glad to see me, Brother Calloway, and I can't expect you to be. But I couldn't rest until I'd told you how ashamed I am that any one of my family should act so badly toward you. I want to apologize for her."

Young Ed burst out into reproaches: "I don't lay it up against *you,* but it's not agreeable to be made an out-and-out fool of, before everybody in four counties. And after I'd laid myself out to get the prize, nearly run my best horse off his legs. . . . I don't know what you call it, but I call it mean and shabby."

"I call it worse than that, Brother Calloway, but you must remember that she's little more'n a child." He remembered Louellen's arguments and used them. "She's not used to being out amongst folks, and when she saw herself brought out before everybody to get crowned, she had a fit of flusters and run away, just like a child will do. That's no excuse, but it's a reason, at least. I wish I might ask you to overlook it."

"Any other girl'd've been tickled to death. She's the queerest girl I ever see. I don't know what keeps me running after her—she's been as cool and uppish ever since the first. . . . And now this. I'll never hear the last of it long's I live. She's made me a joke for every Tom, Dick and Harry on the Shore."

He was finding it a relief to air his grievance. He regarded John Henry with less disfavor. "Of course I know you don't uphold her in it."

John Henry considered. Was this the moment? Would there be a better one? He thought not.

"I don't uphold her in it, and she'll know better herself, when she thinks it over. In fact, she's given every evidence of being utterly sorry now. She wants to apologize to you."

"She does?" Young Ed's face lighted.

"Of course she does. She's just a little flighty, and uncertain, like all young girls, but she's got a good heart, and she really esteems you very highly, and values your attention."

"She's got a queer way of showing it."

"But you must have realized it, for though you say she's been cool and uppish to you—you haven't found her less attractive for that. Maybe you felt that underneath all that was a real liking that she was too bashful to express. . . ."

Young Ed's jaw dropped. The analysis caught his vanity. "By God, there might be something in that."

John Henry passed over the taking of the Lord's name in vain, which normally he would have reprobated. He was closing in on Young Ed. "Yes,—I've thought that all along. And as for making you a laughing-stock, Brother Calloway, there's one way you could turn the tables on all the laughers and make them see that the way she treated you was nothing but what it really is, a piece of childish excitement, foolishness, as you might say."

"Could I,—how?" He was greedily eager.

"If you married her," said John Henry, coolly. "I dare say it's odd for the father of a girl to speak so plainly,

but of course I knew that a young man of your character and standing had no other motive in mind in paying attentions to my daughter than marriage, and you must have known that I welcomed such a connection, because of your being a church member, in good standing. For I've always wanted to see my daughters united to worthy Christian men, and the fact that the Reverend Todd has selected Virgie to be his help-mate has been a great gratification to me. You surely must be aware that no consideration of worldly goods has been in my mind. My children will all be amply provided for."

He was clever enough to leave it there, for a moment. Young Ed was getting the picture entire, his mind taking up one detail after another. True enough—people couldn't laugh at him if he married the girl—he'd have vindicated his right to her. And he *had* been thinking of marrying her! And his old grandfather had been after him to clinch the matter. Of course it was unheard of that any father should literally hold a man up and tell him to marry his daughter, unless there was some pressing reason behind it, but then again it was true what John Henry said about there being no worldly considerations in his mind—there couldn't be. John Henry Hyde was a notoriously well-to-do man. Ed could not help a fleeting wonder that his ostentatiously moral present had so completely obliterated his highly colored past in the mind of so strait-laced a man and strict church man as John Henry, but who was he to question the ways of Divine Providence? He had not the least suspicion that it was his past, and the poorly glossed over marks of it on him, that gave him his value as a counter in John Henry's game. He did not, in his wildest imaginings, suspect John Henry of any sort of game. No, he merely seemed to Ed a worthy but gullible creature whose open simplicity of speech and act gave him yet another attraction as a father-in-law.

The longer these various arguments revolved in his mind, the more convincing, the more inviting, they became. It

was amazing that no such solution had occurred to himself. Marriage. How easy! How simple! He could hold up his head with his fellows and reply to their banter: "You think you know a lot, but you're not so much after all. That little girl's going to marry me—fact—yes, we've made it all up. Oh—that nonsense at the tournament—pooh—we'd just had a little spat, that was all. She didn't mean to let me down so." He could hear himself saying it. It would explain, it would reinstate him. The sullenness gradually cleared from his face, he regarded John Henry almost affectionately.

"You're perfectly correct in thinking, Brother Hyde, that I had no intention except marriage when I started going with Judy. I don't even like to hear you hint at anything else." (Might as well get all the credit he could out of it!) "Of course I was considerable wrought up by yesterday's proceedings, but I can see it, now you've put it to me, just how it happened. I certainly appreciate your coming over here this morning to have this little talk. I reckon—now, what would you advise me to do, exactly?"

John Henry was ready with his remedy. "Why, just act like nothing had happened. Stay away a few days, till she begins to miss you, and then drop over to supper, casual like,—say about Thursday. You'll see, pretty plain, how she feels. I won't mention that I've been over."

"Nor I won't. Say, if we can make it up all right, I'd just as soon have the wedding pretty quick."

John Henry paused, his foot on the buggy step, ready to get in.

"Virgie and Brother Todd are to be united along in the New Year," he offered. "The Presiding Elder himself will perform the ceremony. I don't see any reason why it shouldn't be a double wedding, if you're agreeable."

There was only one thing lacking, meditated John Henry, as he drove away, and that was the consent of the prospective bride. He promised himself that he would effect that.

At first he said nothing about it, leaving Judy under the ban of his displeasure, but not much more so than usual. He ignored her, apparently, and she kept out of his sight as far as possible. She was still dazed with the outrage of his violence, and upon that came the news that Lee Kemp had gone away for good, and that Mart Bladen was lying near to death from a fall, an accident as yet unexplained. Beside these calamities John Henry's anger dwindled to nothing.

"Let me go over and see Unc' Mart," she had begged Louellen, from the first. "Let me go, Mother. I'll slip over when Pa's away. He'll surely expect me to come. I want to see him myself."

But Louellen was unexpectedly firm. John Henry was so mild she could not see him roused up again. "You can't do a thing for him, Judy, and both his sisters are there. Besides, they tell me he's in a stupor most of the time. I'd rather you'd not go. Some way or other your Pa might get hold of it, and then we'll have all this to-do over again, worse than ever. No, you stay on the place, like he told you."

"But, Mother—it's Unc' Mart."

But Louellen would not yield. To deny Judy this was a small price to pay for peace at home. She could not altogether trust John Henry's abatement of wrath. Possibly he was having Judy watched. . . . She would not have him provoked again.

As for Judy, first Mart's illness, then the going of Lee, first one, then the other, deluged her with grief. Her whole world had gone awry ever since that day of the tournament. If Lee had only come to say good-by! "He was so discouraged when he lost the tournament he just cut and run," she told herself. "Oh, if I could only do that, too."

She did not know where he had gone and she did not dare ask any one save Mammy Rachel, and the small tidings that the old woman brought back to her were not reassur-

ing. "Folks say he way out West somewhere—nobody doan know jes zacly where," she reported.

To be thus bereft, thus roughly deprived of all solace, subdued and destroyed Judy's will. She was pale and tame when Young Ed made his promised supper visit, and repeated the apology John Henry had dinned into her, with real feeling. She had so suffered she could understand how cruel it was to make any one else suffer. She was ashamed before him, she did not dislike him so much. And she could say, "I am sorry I was rude, I really am," and look at him as if she meant it. He, observing her confusion, her loss of color, set it all down to her feeling for himself and was pleased accordingly.

Slowly and with craft, John Henry urged Young Ed's suit for him, letting him keep silence, and Judy, being hopeless, came slowly, slowly, more and more under the influence of that dominant aggressive will that was never tired in beating back her own. What was the use of struggling! Lee was gone! Unc' Mart was as good as gone. She was in such depths of despair as only youth can ever know, the same despair that had gripped Lee after the tournament, the despair that leaves no way of escape, no loophole for the future, the despair that brings one to a blank wall, and leaves one there, beating against it.

Beating against it, yes, for a while, but after a little one ceases to beat. One stands, with arms dropped, waiting, waiting for nothing but the imperceptible passage of time. And the heart plays a funeral march, and all the movement of the soul and the body is ordered to fit its dreary tempo.

A strong impulse from without will carry one, then, in any direction, even in the direction one would normally never go. So with Judy. And John Henry's persistent, nagging will supplied the motive that pushed her ever nearer to Young Ed.

It was not until he actually made it clear that he expected her to marry Young Ed at New Year when Virgie married

Willy Todd that she knew where she had been driven. She turned to Louellen in a gust of rebellion.

Louellen had been watching events anxiously, but helplessly. Young Ed still was to her harmless enough, not prepossessing, to be sure, but not impossible. Perhaps through marriage to him lay Judy's escape from John Henry, she had thought, and so she had kept silence. She was ignorant of Lee, and Judy's feeling for him—she was unaware that they even knew each other, and she passionately wanted Judy away—out of the house, out of John Henry's sight, out of earshot, out of his power to injure. Her sense of expediency saw Young Ed as a possible means to that desirable end—not the best means, perhaps, but at hand and available. And now came Judy in this fresh distress.

"But Judy—" expostulated her mother, "I thought you had made it up that you liked Ed Calloway. You've been nice and pleasant to him lately. I didn't say anything because I didn't want to urge you—"

"But Mother—Mother—to *marry* him—to live along of that terrible toad's face and toad's hands—Mother—you won't let me do it—you won't—you can't—mother—"

Swift across Louellen's mind came that day of her own wedding when she had clutched as frantically, as hysterically at her own mother and begged deliverance from one she hated—and had not received it. Perhaps Ed Calloway had revealed himself to Judy even as John Henry had to her. The thought shook her soul.

"I can't—I can't—" Judy was crying. "I'll kill myself first. Ed Calloway's a dreadful man—I won't marry him! And he'll make me do it—Pa'll make me do it. Oh, I'm afraid of him—he'll make me do it—this is what he's been up to all this time—to make me do something I hate so's to hurt and punish me—but I won't—I won't—"

"Hush," said Louellen, "Hush! No, you shan't—nothing shall make you—" But instantly she knew that Judy's words were true, that again she had divined the hidden ma-

lignancy of John Henry, had seen through to his secret purpose. And Louellen knew more—that the matter was past her hands to remedy. That nothing she could say or do would swerve John Henry now. He had tricked them all.

She thought again of her threat to tell—her threat to tell publicly, before every one. So John Henry had risked that. He had thought she could not do it. And could she—would she? Again she doubted. Could she stretch out her arms against the enclosing pillars, and like a blind Samson bring the whole tradition of their respectability, their decent pride, down on their heads, felling them all in never-ending ignominy and shame? If it was on herself and John Henry alone—yes! But Virgie and Bud would be crushed beneath the ruins—and Judy, most of all. To what worse destruction might such revelation bring Judy! No, not yet—not yet—John Henry's risk was sound. It had not been her threat of confession that had held his hand from Judy. She saw that now. But he meant to have his way with her, nevertheless, and a vision of what that way meant to John Henry was vouchsafed her.

And then she spoke, as though the words had come to her not from her usual self, but from some inner volition that had seized and mastered her, that directed her through some hidden and unconscious revelation, toward the one quarter whence real help might come. She took swift and desperate resolve.

"You wait till your Pa's out of the house," she said, "and then you go over to Mart Bladen's and tell him I sent you. Tell him the pass you're come to, and the fix you're in, and ask him what to do. Be sure to tell him I sent you. He'll understand that."

"But Unc' Mart's sick in bed—helpless—"

"I know. But still—I've got a feeling that he'll do something. You tell him I said he *must* do something. That it's his turn to see to you—that I've done my possible—"

"But, mother—that's a queer thing to say—"

"Never mind—you say it. I'd go with you, but it's better not. I'll stay here and if your Pa should come in I can keep him from finding out you're gone. Listen—I think he's going now."

They listened. Heavy steps diminishing to silence warned them that the master of the house had left it.

"He'll be down at the barn, with the hands. You go right along now. And tell me what I said you was to say to Mart."

Judy repeated the message like a child. "That he must do something. That you'd sent me. That it's his turn to see to me, and that you've done your possible—is that all, mother?"

"Yes, that's all. Slip on your cape and run."

She did not kiss her, or even put her arms around her, but when she saw her run down the lane and turn the corner by the spring house, Louellen Hyde dropped down and buried her face in her hands. "If I wasn't so weak I wouldn't've done it," she cried, defending herself to herself, "But there's nobody else. There's nobody else."

There had been urgency in her mother's voice that lent wings to Judy's feet. She ran with all speed down the faint twisted path, briars catching her cape, branches stinging across her face. Somehow, without her knowing, dreadful unseen forces had been loosed about her, and she could not tell what they would do to her. She knew nothing of why she was sent to Mart—it was strange—before, her mother had counseled her not to go. And Mart himself had seemed loath to make any move to help her when she had come to him before. Now she was to go to him to ask for help. Presently she forgot to think, she ran so fast. . . .

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

In Mart Bladen, lying still, straining against the weakness that bound him, stirred a strange faint memory—Cæsar was standing, growling softly, as Spot and Silly had once stood and growled. And some one was running—breathless—even as some one else had once run—breathless, panting— . . . Instinctively he looked toward the window, where, on that night, he had seen Louellen's white distracted face. . . . He listened for Louellen's voice. . . . He was sure he could hear her calling to him.

But it was the door that was burst open, and it was Judy who entered, to run to him, dropping down beside his bed, burrowing her head into his shoulder, holding tight to him.

But just as at that other time he demanded, "What's the matter—what's the matter, honey? Anything wrong over at your house—?"

"Nothing but me—nothing but me— Oh, Unc' Mart, I've wanted so to see you. Did you think queer of my not coming? I wanted to—Pa wouldn't let me—"

"I supposed as much. Here, you sit on the side of the bed. My, but you're a welcome sight! I've been thinking about you a whole lot."

"And I was thinking about you. Oh, that was one reason I've been so unhappy. But I'm forgetting—"

"Forgetting?"

She drew away from him, settled herself more quietly on the bed, holding tightly to his hands. She fixed her eyes on his earnestly: "Ma sent me over here. She said you must do something. She said it was your turn to do something for me, because she'd done her possible."

"Louellen sent me that word?" It was a long-silent

voice speaking to him—a voice he must answer. "Louellen? What for, Judy—what's behind it?"

And now she told him the rest. She was being forced to marry Ed Calloway . . . no, Pa didn't threaten her exactly, but he kept at her. . . . He kept telling her what a slight she'd put on him, and how this was the only way to make it up. . . . That he'd make her a good husband. . . . That everybody thought she was going to marry him, and it would be another and more dreadful slight if she tried to back out of it. . . .

"I don't know how it is," she confessed at the end. "I don't want to do it, I hate Ed Calloway, but Pa keeps at me so—somehow—I don't seem to have any will of my own left. I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid he'll make me do it." She paused, recollecting her other grief. "Oh, Unc' Mart, what made Lee go off without leaving any word for me?"

"But he did, Judy, he did. He left word with me, and then I had to fall out the loft like a sack o' meal, and couldn't bring it to you, and I've been so wrop up in my own self I let it go by, anyway. I might've got a letter to you, I suppose. But I kind of thought every day you'd slip off and come to see me."

"What word did he leave me, Unc' Mart—please?"

"He left word you was to wait for him, and that he'd come back soon as he could come with his head up, and money in his pockets. And he asked me to look out for you till he come."

She sighed, her young face strangely sad. "I wish he hadn't gone. It was most too late—that message, wasn't it, Unc' Mart?"

"No, it's not," cried Mart loudly. "You're not in such a bad fix yet, Judy. You're all shook up now, and excited. Stay here with me a little while, and let's see what we can do. I've got out of worse coils than this, by Judas Priest, I have."

Confidence is catching and youth unconsciously takes its

key from the nearest loudest note. Judy dropped a little of her anxiety. She looked round her practically.

"I might redd up this room," she offered. "It looks like a hurrah's nest. I don't see why Ephum lets things get so bad."

"It's more me than Ephum," said Mart, absent-mindedly. He watched her as she moved about, picking up the scattered papers, hanging up clothes, carrying out dirty tumblers, wiping dust away. It was dear and wonderful to see her thus engaged, her yellow hair a light in the dinginess, her grace a leaven to the barrenness. But he did not forget that the problem he had set for himself had now been literally thrown at him for solution. He must not fail Louellen and her trust. In the short time yet allowed to him he must do that for Judy which would keep her life unspoiled for the living of it, give her herself, inviolate, body and soul, for the future.

"I could hire her for a nurse," he mused, "but John Henry Hyde'd raise the neighborhood, and being under age he could take her back by force, if he was so minded. And he'd be so minded. Even if he let her stay, it'd only be for the little while I've got left and then she'd be right back where she'd started. If I was to make my will and leave her everything I've got, the Deacon'd get his claws on every cent before a month was out, and more'n likely Sis Mollie and Sis Rhoda would make a fuss and contest it and in the end Judy might get nothing. That Lee ain't coming back till he's done something worth showing, and there wouldn't be any use his coming till he did. If she run off with him they'd have it hard and poor. I don't want to leave things thataway. Well, I served notice on the Lord that I wasn't going to die till I'd got some plan to make Judy scot-free and independent, but I hadn't any idea He was going to take me up so quick. But I'll match Him. I'm not going to let John Henry push my little Judy into Ed Calloway's filthy paws—"

He opened his eyes wide and stared at Judy as he slowly

followed the first gleam of possibility. Why, it was very simple. So simple that it was strange he had not thought of it in the very first moment. It was a way, he assured himself, that would bring about all he desired, all that Judy needed. It would even provide safeguards for her future that otherwise he could not give. As for himself—he could have lifted his great voice and hallooed for joy. He need not die alone and uncompanioned. Here was also the way out of his loneliness, out of his darkness.

Yet it was daring—daring even for Mart Bladen who had never shirked a hurdle, however high. He thought of the risks of it—for this was a high hurdle indeed. Uneasy qualms made themselves vaguely felt, but he would not yield to them, yet he knew he must act quickly before they had time to strengthen. Act first and repent afterward, had been one of his pet jests. He did not mean to exchange it for anything cooler and less foolhardy now.

Was it selfish?—well then, he meant to have something for himself. Now at the last. It was for such a little time. Later there would be Lee—or maybe some other clean lithe boy with clear eyes and a heart to break and be mended by Judy. Lee would understand. He would write to him. Write to him fully, plainly. He would not care. If he did, it could not be helped. Since he could not defend his own, Mart must use such defense as he could choose. And so. . . .

"Judy," he began, "stop fussing round the room and listen to me. You don't want to go back home, do y' ?"

Judy came to the foot of the bed and answered somberly. "I haven't got any other place to go. Pa'd come and get me back anywhere I went. And then it'd be worse than ever."

"Would you like to stay over here with me? I'd buy you lots of pretties, and you could have a riding horse and everything you want."

"And I could take care of you and nurse you and see that your room was all clean and neat," flashed Judy with

instant response. "But there, what's the use of talking about it. Pa'd be more against that than anything."

Now for the crucial moment. Mart Bladen's voice shook a little. "There's one way you could stay and John Henry couldn't help it. Suppose I was to send in town for a license and get Judge Markwood out here—he's a justice of the peace, too, you know—and he should marry you and me, Judy? How about that? Then you'd have a right to stay and do as you please and go as you please, and the Deacon might ra'r till he gets tired, and that's all the good it'd do him. As for Young Ed—pooh—that'd be the end of him. 'Twouldn't be nothing at all but having Judge Markwood say a few words before us, and then, I could take care of you, Judy. And you'd have to take care of me, for the little bit of time I'm going to be here. You could keep things redd up and boss Ephum and Sally and give me my medicine and read the paper to me. Come—what say? Don't you want to swap off trouble for peace and kindness?"

He watched her narrowly and was relieved to see that she was not shocked, nor surprised. She met his eyes as she had always done, like an honest child. "But—Unc' Mart," she said, "I never said anything, but—I always laid out in my mind that I'd marry Lee when I grew up. I think he means to come back after me, too. Only he went off so funny—"

Mart could not help laughter. "Judy," he said, growing serious, "I've got a year to live, and that's all. You might as well know that. For all you're a child in a lot of ways, I want you to remember that I told you everything, fair and square. Going through the marriage ceremony with me won't mean a thing except that you'll be out of John Henry's power and jurisdiction forever, and you'll live here in this house, like—like you was my child. When I go, you'll be free and independent, with my prop'ty, for I'll leave it all to you. I want you here with me for that year, Judy. I want you round, laughing and teasing me, and

eating licorice and bothering Sally. I want you to take care of me, and I want to take care of you, like I said. Afterward, if Lee comes back, you'll be free and happy, I hope, waiting for him. It won't be my fault if you're not. There's the whole case, plain."

She ran to him, put her arms around him. Only one thing was clear to her, but it was enough. "Unc' Mart—you don't mean it—only a year! Oh, Unc' Mart! Yes, yes, let me stay here with you—I don't care about Lee or the prop'ty or anything, only to stay here and take care of you." Her loving, grieving tears wet his cheek.

"There, there—what a freshet!" he said, half teasing. "Don't do that, Judy. We got to move and move quick, now, else the Deacon might put a spoke in our wheel after all. Dry up your eyes and reach me down the ink-bottle and a piece of paper, and then call Ephum and tell him to have one of the hands saddle up to ride in town. I think I'll send for Doc Tithelow, too. I don't want any questionings—later on."

He laboriously wrote his letter while Judy looked on, wondering, yet palpably trusting. Ephum was called in and dispatched with his instructions, and following him, Sally was summoned.

"Miss Judy's going to be here for dinner," said Mart, "so you want to fix up something that'll please a sweet tooth."

"Now we're started," he went on to Judy. "There's a room right over this one, upstairs, used to be my mother's. You go on up and look at it and see if you like it, and if you want any new things for it, because it'll be yours from this time on. You can just projeck around all over the house, if you want to. I'll have to depend on you to get everything fixed up to your liking, you know."

She went eagerly, diverted. He heard her light steps running up the stairs and smiled.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

JUDGE MARKWOOD and Doctor Tithelow had been astonished, but after an explanation, approving.

"It's thisaway with me. I want to leave her my prop'ty and if she takes my name I can do it, and keep Sis Mollie and Sis Rhoda off it, and more'n that, she'll be shut forever of John Henry Hyde's devilishness. He's set and determined to marry her off to Young Ed Calloway, and she run off over here in desperation. I don't see what else there is to do. She's the only human being I care a silver three-cent piece for, or that cares a silver three-cent piece for me. I been fond of her ever since she was knee high to a pint cup, and watched her grow up and all. You know what marrying her to Young Ed would be, don't you? And maybe I was figuring one for Judy and two for myself, for it's a mighty gratifying thought to me to have her round for the little time I've got to stay."

"John Henry Hyde ought to be tarred and feathered," snorted Doc Tithelow. "Young Ed Calloway's tainted and he knows it, as well as any man in the county."

The Judge nodded his head augustly. "He comes of bad stock," he pronounced. "If I had a daughter and he came courting her, I'd send my nigger out to beat him. I wouldn't dirty my own hands with him."

"You can tie us up rock-bound, can't you, Judge?" asked Mart. "She's under age, but will that make any difference? And before you go I want you should draw me my will."

"It will be binding," said the Judge, "even though she is a minor. Hyde wouldn't dare start annulment proceedings. It could be brought out that the girl fled to you from the prospect of being forced into marrying young Calloway. I'll see to Hyde if he attempts to make trouble."

"Call me as a witness," added Doctor Tithelow with a chuckle.

"Then I guess we'd better send for her and get this over with," said Mart. "Until I've got a legal hold on her I'm none too sure of what John Henry might do."

"I'll call in Ephum and Sally," said the Doctor, and stepped to the door. "Come on, Judy," he said, "I've got a bad fever patient down in the Neck and I've got to get along."

Judy appeared simultaneously with the two servants.

"Stand over here by the bed," said the Judge, looking at her kindly. She did so, and took affectionately the hand Mart held out to her. She was neither excited nor even deeply interested, save that she had escaped from home. Unc' Mart said this was all right and that had satisfied her docile, unmolded mind.

The brief and businesslike words of the civil ceremony being said, Ephum relieved an awkward moment.

"Sally and me p'sents our best respecks en fair wishes," he said, grandiloquently bowing and scraping. "Sally, you go right erlong en stir up a cake en I'll kill a couple chickens. We cain' eat no such trash as po'k dumplings en apple pie to-day."

"That's the right idea, Ephum," spoke the Doctor. "Well now, everything's fixed up according to law and order and I'll have to be riding."

"No, you stay and witness my will," said Mart. "Run on out, Judy."

The will was very short, and after the Judge and the Doctor had gone, Judy poked her fair head into the room again.

"Say, Unc' Mart," she said, "oughtn't I go home and tell Ma?"

"I don't believe I would. If the Deacon gets the idea that she connived at this he might blame her and say a good bit more'n his prayers. Besides, I don't want you under his roof no more."

She paused a little, puzzled by her change in status.

"Well—am I going to stay right along now? I'll have to have my clothes and things, Unc' Mart."

"You can ride in town to-morrow and buy yourself some clothes," he promised. "I expect you can get along till then. Set down and read me the last *Democrat* till dinner's ready. Or maybe you'd like to talk about how you'd want to fix up this old place."

The abilities of that notable housewife, Jane West, had not been wholly lost in her granddaughter. Judy assumed a mature air and spoke with emphasis.

"I reckon I would. Everything's got to be cleaned—mercy, I could scrub for a week and not get done! And new paint! And whitewash! And curtains!"

"I don't want this place all prettified up like a dollhouse," he teased. "Next thing you'll want to tie a ribbon round my neck."

Judy could tease as well as he: "A blue one to match your eyes, Unc' Mart. You'd look *fine!*"

"You got blue eyes, too, you know," he said, "so I reckon you'll have to wear the ribbon for me. But maybe we might whitewash up a little, though I'm not going to promise about the curtains. Everybody's told me all my life that I'd finally be ruined by women's whims, and I'm not going to have it come true at this late date. Besides, I want to see out the window. It's the most life I get."

"I forgot." She was instantly contrite. "Unc' Mart—will people call me Mrs. Bladen now?"

"If they know what's what, they will."

She reflected on this. "I'm glad. You've always seemed more like my own folks than any of them, except Mother, and now you really are."

He was startled. "Did you ever say that to your Ma?"

"I don't think so, but it's true, all the same. I'm going out in the kitchen and get me some bread and sugar. I'm *hungry*. I've hardly eaten a bite to-day I've been so worked up." She came back a moment later, to say a little wor-

riedly: "Pa'll be so mad at me now! But he can't do a thing to me, can he?"

Mart's answering shout followed her: "You bet he can't."

But he was not so sure. John Henry Hyde was tenacious and revengeful. "And if he begins to speak," Mart Bladen told himself, "there's no knowing to what lengths he'll go. If I was a sound man instead of being laid here in this bed like a log, I'd not be afraid of him, for I could stop him no matter what he said or did. But thisaway—" He felt a rising tide of apprehension. It would not wait—John Henry's retaliation. It would be immediate, and vile. Mart knew the man. "He'll strike like a rattlesnake," he thought restlessly.

Even while he waited there was a sound of hurrying heavy footsteps on the doorstone, and John Henry himself strode in at the door, his face twisted with anger. Behind him came Louellen Hyde, hatless, dishevelled by haste, fear incarnate.

"Where's the girl?" demanded John Henry.

Mart Bladen's bed was high and he was well propped with pillows. He stretched his right hand toward the bell that would summon Ephum, but did not ring.

"This is right neighborly of you, John Henry," he said softly, "right neighborly. Won't you sit down? And you, too, Louellen." His voice changed to anxious gentleness when he spoke to her. She leaned toward him, her hands clasped, entreating.

"If you're harboring Judy—" began the Deacon, but Bladen interrupted him.

"I reckon you might call it harboring. Judy's here and she's going to stay. Judge Markwood brought out a license an hour ago and married her to me. What you got to say to that?"

The room was full of breathing, battling emotions. The black vein in John Henry's head jerked with the violence of his fury. His whole body shook with emotion, and his mouth twitched and panted like a man in epilepsy. He

lifted lean strong hands in crooked threatening gestures. He turned on his wife.

"All these years I kept silence," he began at last, the words like blows. "All these years I forgave you your mortal sin, Louellen, and overlooked your transgression. And now you plot and scheme with this vile and wretched man, this wretched sinner who ain't more'n a step from the devil's clutches and with eternity staring him in the face,—you plot and scheme with him for this abomination. Woe unto—"

"You keep a civil tongue in your head, John Henry," warned Bladen, "and don't begin the woe-untos here. I can't get up and tackle you, but, by God, I'll find some way to mark y' if you don't heed me."

But Louellen Hyde took up the gage and her loathing and hatred leaped from her as a sword of shining steel in the hand of desperation.

"*You* kept silence, John Henry," she flung at him. "*You* kept silence. Yes—and why? Lest something should come out that would reflect against *your* good name! Lest you shouldn't set so high in the church. *They* was the reasons why you kept silence. You knew the truth from the first. But there wasn't a thought in your mind, there wasn't a thing you did, or a wish of your innermost heart that wasn't self, self, self. You spared yourself the finger-pointing and the nastiness of it as well as me, and you'd never've spared me if you could've spared yourself without it. And you've always been cruel and hard with Judy, punished her and ruled her far different from the others because you knew you could best hurt and spite me by doing things to her. You've done your best to kill every little spark of life in the child, and you was trying to drive her into a marriage that would've been worse than mine with you, if such a thing can be. But now she's delivered out of your hand. She's free of you. And you'll keep silence still, same as you've always done, else—"

She stopped and turned. The door from the kitchen was

flung open and Judy ran in, precipitate, flushed, laughing.

"Oh, Unc' Mart,—Sally's made a cake big's—why—*Mother—Father!*"

The three elders were held in hideous immobility, silent, darkened, rigid, waiting. At last it broke.

"Don't call *me* father," spat John Henry. *"There's your father!"*

He pointed to Mart Bladen.

Something more terrible than all that had gone before clashed and smothered through the room, and the man on the bed struggled with furious impotence to rise.

"You damned old—" But Judy stopped him.

"Why—" she stammered, looking from one to another piteously. "Why—what—"

"Yes, it's true," went on John Henry, gloatingly, "and your mother's connived at your marrying him. Lot's daughters! Incest! I wonder God don't strike you dead, Louellen."

He gloated over them, an old hawk, who has made his kill, filled, replete with revenge. "You're not done with this!" he threatened. "I'll see to you—all of ye!" He turned and left them. They heard his footsteps on the gravel path, toward the road. Let them find some way out for themselves, now, these abominable sinners, their self-righteous cadences said. He was done with them! Yet in his going he acknowledged defeat, and the three left behind forgot him before he was out of earshot.

"Mother," cried Judy. "Mother, is it true? Is Unc' Mart really my father?"

Louellen Hyde went to the bed and took Mart Bladen's hand. She spoke as a woman who has been both afraid and ashamed to love, yet has loved greatly and now is neither ashamed nor afraid.

"It's true. I was promised to your Unc' Mart and we had a misunderstanding and I took your Pa. And no sooner was I married, young fool that I was, when I found out what marrying without love means. It makes you hate

your body and it dries up your soul. That's what it did to me, anyway. Maybe there's some who can submit and be dutiful, but if so they must've got a different man than I did. And once when I was desperate, I come over here. I was bound to get away from John Henry—bound to. But I wasn't brave enough to stay. I went back. Oh, Mart, I wisht I'd've stayed. I wisht I had."

"No," said Mart Bladen. "You couldn't've done different. I didn't blame you for going back. It would've been more than you could've stood."

"I've stood worse things," said Louellen, thin-lipped.

Their hands held and clung, their eyes met across a great waste of unlived years. He who had been so careless and so strong and so alive was now a broken cripple, near to death. She who had been so fresh and beautiful and proud and pliant, was now stiff-set and coldly staid and sallow. There was no going back for them. They knew it and they turned involuntarily to Judy, pledge of their love,—with all of life before her.

"You think it's all right, Louellen?" asked Mart. "You know full well it's nothing but marrying in name. She's my daughter, and she's mighty close in my heart. I'll shelter her and take care of her, just as you have. I couldn't figure out no other way to get her free of John Henry for good and all. And—I *wanted* somebody of my own. You understand, Louellen? You trust me?"

"You know I trust you. I wisht I always had. When I sent her, I didn't know what you'd do, but I was at the end of my rope, and I didn't know where to turn. But I had a feeling that somehow you'd take care of her, once it was put before you. And you have. And don't take any thought about John Henry. I'll see that he keeps his mouth shut. I—I'm glad Judy's going to be here with you, Mart. It's right she should be."

Her voice changed to commonplace. "Now, listen here, Judy, I'll pack up some of your things and send 'em over this evening. And I'll be coming over to see you now and

then. Bud and Virgie'll be over, too. You better not come home till your Pa gets cooled down some. Take good care of your Unc' Mart."

The naming of him so quieted Judy's whirling thoughts. She was so used to the Deacon's venom that it had touched her lightly. Her mother's quiet, and her plain unexcited words of farewell made the wild scene she had just now had part in unreal and impossible.

"You better let me prop you up again, all comfortable," she said to Mart when they were alone. "You've got your pillows every whichaway."

She shook the pillows and readjusted them. "It's queer," she went on, half to herself, half to him. "I always loved you better than Pa. I reckon I oughtn't to call him that."

"Yes, you ought," said Mart, firmly. "Things must seem to go on just like they always have. Nobody must ever know what was said here to-day except us four. We won't even talk about it 'mongst ourselves. That's for your mother's sake, as well as yours, Judy."

"Oh, yes—I see. Anyway, Unc' Mart, I'm glad, I'm glad's I can be that you're my father. I'm *glad,* whether we talk about it or not."

"You're a good girl, Judy," he said. He leaned wearily among the pillows. The emotions of the day had shaken and weakened his failing body. But he was happy, happier than he had ever expected to be. Life at the very door of death, had yielded him rich largess, bounty far beyond his deserts. He had no fear of the outcome of this fantastic means by which he had contrived to bring Judy by his side. It would be to her protection, development, bloom, and later, freedom. For him it meant the warmth of a sustaining devotion in the approaching chill.

After he had gone, she would go on, free, confident, and later there would be love and a good man for her, children to play through these dull rooms, and run breathless under the shade of the tulip trees even as he had done. It was right that it should be so. She was his child, his own. On

this very bed where he now lay she had been conceived, in such ecstasy of tenderness, such helpless beauty of passion that the moment had turned all his life to constancy, had cleared and established his heart in a secret garden, sweet with the flowers of remembrance, refreshed by a never-failing spring of sureness that love freely given, freely returned, making no claims, yielding, accepting, without fear or complaint, is forever justified and right.

The old laughter came again to his eyes. He waved his hand jauntily as one who would give greeting. His lips moved. He was saying, inaudibly, but with fervor of gratitude:

"Much obliged, God."

TOURNAMENT RULES*

I. The distance shall be 120 yards, the time 11 seconds and the entrance fee $1.

II. The rings shall be 1½ inches in diameter excepting in the riding off of ties in which case the rings shall be one inch in diameter and all rings shall be wrapped.

III. There shall be three Judges, one Marshal and two assistants or two Heralds, two Timekeepers and one Flagman.

IV. At the appointed time the Knights shall all come mounted upon their steeds to the Judges' stand to hear the reading of the rules and the charge to the Knights.

V. After the reading of the rules and the charge to the Knights the Marshals shall conduct the Knights to the point of starting.

VI. Each Knight shall have one trial ride at three rings 1½ inches in diameter.

VII. Each Knight shall have three rides at all three rings 1½ inches in diameter for the prizes.

VIII. After each Knight has had three rides at all three rings the Knight who is found to have carried the highest number of rings to the Judges' stand shall be entitled to the first prize with the privilege of crowning the Queen of Love and Beauty, the Queen of the Tourney.

IX. The Knights who are found to have returned the second, third, fourth and fifth highest number of rings shall be entitled to the second, third, fourth and fifth prizes with the privilege of crowning the first, second, third and fourth maids to the Queen of Love and Beauty, the Queen of the Tourney.

X. The Prizes shall be: first prize, $15; second prize, $10; third prize, $8; fourth prize, $5; fifth prize, $3.

XI. If at the end of the prize rides any two or three or more Knights shall be found to have returned to the Judges' stand the same number of rings these Ties shall be ridden off and the rules governing the prize riding shall also govern the riding off of Ties except that the rings for the riding off of Ties shall be one inch in diameter.

XII. Any Knight passing through the first Arch and attempting to take first ring must continue on through the course and a second ride shall not be given to any Knight except on account ot an accident to the Knight, or his horse, his saddle or bridle or some obstruction visible to the Judges comes in his path.

XIII. If because of an accident to the Knight or his horse, his saddle or his bridle, or if because some obstruction comes in his path the Judges see fit to give to any Knight a second ride he shall ride for all three rings.

XIV. The Knights shall abide strictly by the decision of the Judges.

XV. After the riding all the Knights must come mounted to the Judges' stand to hear the result of the tilting.

* See Chapter Nine for a description of The Tournament.

NOTE.—These rules, which for many years governed all Maryland tournaments, were obtained through the kindness of Mr. J. Owen Knotte, of Denton, Caroline County.

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